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**Beyond the Plantation: Salt, Turks Islands, Bermuda  
and the British Atlantic World, 1660s-1850s**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Caribbean Studies

Yesu Persaud Centre for Caribbean Studies  
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## Declaration

This thesis is the author's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

This thesis offers a briny counterpoint to the sugar-centred focus of Caribbean historiography, finding encouragement in research that looks beyond the plantation and towards the Atlantic's maritime and migratory populations. It argues that the model of plantation-driven development cannot adequately explain the diverse array of socioeconomic and political processes that occurred within the Caribbean.

It uses the principal salt islands of the British Caribbean – Turks Islands – as a case study and follows a sinew population of Bermudian salt gatherers, merchants and enslaved salt rakers into an alternative space of slavery. Its chronological scope begins with these islands' discovery by seafaring Bermudians in the 1660s and extends to a generation beyond emancipation. It takes a cis-Atlantic approach, exploring different historical themes at different analytical scales, in order to demonstrate that the history of Turks Islands, and their position within the British Atlantic world, cannot be fully understood without salt taking centre stage. However, while this thesis diversifies our understanding of Caribbean processes, it does not intend to fragment the region's history further. Here the salt industry did not compete with the sugar industry. It complemented, supported and *literally* fed into it, as salted rations reinforced plantation provisioning. In delving into the history of salt's production and trade, this thesis shines a light on an ancillary industry of the sugar plantation complex.

In the process, a rich inter-island history between Turks Islands and Bermuda is revealed that raises a question about transplantation between colonial societies. This thesis finds that while Turks Islands were, in many ways, an extension of Bermuda's maritime economy, salt's materiality and its saline environment also spoke with its own vernacular. This shaped an unusual trajectory for Turks Islands, as they were drawn away from the margins and into the British Atlantic world.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Born in mid-eighteenth-century Bermuda, Captain John Lightbourn was the first of five children and grew up in a colony that was overcrowded.<sup>1</sup> Like many of his contemporaries facing bleak economic prospects on land, Lightbourn took to the sea entering Bermuda's merchant fleet as a mariner and later becoming a merchant in his own right. As Lightbourn navigated the Atlantic littoral, serving on board the *Experiment* and later as captain of the *Adriana*, *Cherub* and *Hummingbird*, it is likely he would have called in at Turks Islands (see Figure 1.1). There, Bermudian salt gatherers and their enslaved salt rakers were to be found in the islands' saltwater lagoons. Under a scorching sun and knee-deep in brine, they worked to harvest the 'other white gold' of the British Caribbean for markets across North America.<sup>2</sup> Whether the result of his own observation or second-hand deductions, Lightbourn decided to try his hand at this salt industry. By 1806, he was living at Turks Islands, while his wife and three children remained in Bermuda.

Over the next six years, Lightbourn's experiences of Turks Islands were recorded in a varied correspondence with his nephew, William Astwood, who was a member of the Bermuda House of Assembly, a partner of the merchant house Wadson & Astwood and a devoted relative.<sup>3</sup> Their letters repeatedly disclosed their strong socioeconomic connections. A host of family matters were attended to. This included passing on joyful news of family births as well as regrettable accounts of death and illness. For example, in 1806, Astwood informed his uncle, 'I am sorry to tell you that your poor sister Martha is very near making her Exit', while on several occasions he warned Lightbourn of the growing ill-health of his wife, recommending that 'as soon as you can anyway, make it convenient to come home, as I consider your presence would be [of] more service to her than any medical assistance'.<sup>4</sup> To thicken their social ties,

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<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Kennedy, 'The Other White Gold: Salt, Slaves, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Colonialism', *The Historian*, Vol. 69. No. 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 215-230.

<sup>3</sup> Butz, *The Letterbook* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> 'Letter from William Astwood to John Lightbourn', 21 August 1806, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William*

gifts of turtles, ambergris and cashmere were passed between these relatives with complements and affection. Provision scares and price spikes in both places were discussed in detail, as intermittent embargoes on the American trade threatened to hurt Turks Islands and Bermuda alike. Epidemics of influenza that started in Bermuda were reportedly carried by ship to Turks Islands as unwanted passengers. All of these topics, often ones of real sentiment, frequently sat alongside seemingly more impersonal business matters.

At Turks Islands, Lightbourn was a salt gatherer and merchant. The commodity that originally brought him to Turks Islands – salt – was omnipresent in his writing. Time and again Lightbourn reported on the sale of salt, the health of the salt season, the checks of rain from above and the impacts embargoes and war with America might have on his economic prospects. As a dutiful correspondent, Astwood paid attention to the latest trans-Atlantic news arriving at Bermuda to relay to his uncle. In 1810, he predicted, ‘there being a free intercourse again with America, I expect salt will be a brisk sale with you and of course Provisions cheap’, to which Lightbourn cheerfully replied, ‘we all enjoy good health here, and the sale of salt seems very brisk’.<sup>5</sup> But the economic activities of these men were more interconnected than the foregoing suggests. Lightbourn was also a debt collector for Astwood, whose merchant house had business interests at Turks Islands that included the hiring-out of enslaved labourers. Lightbourn would call around the local houses to collect Astwood’s fees or settle debts in the local inferior court when these were not forthcoming. In Bermuda, Astwood repaid the favour, granting Lightbourn a small share of the monies, securing salt sales for him when he could, and sending Lightbourn provisions as trade allowed. Furthermore, the extended family’s enslaved persons were often sent between these islands, revealing both the prevalence of, and connections between, slavery in Turks Islands and Bermuda. By 1812, the year

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*Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), pp. 15-16. ‘Letter from William Astwood to John Lightbourn’, undated, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Letter from William Astwood to John Lightbourn’, 23 May 1810, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 52. ‘Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood’, 20 December 1810, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 64.

the surviving records end, the Lightbourns and Astwoods represented a typical Bermudian family that had branched out across these islands.

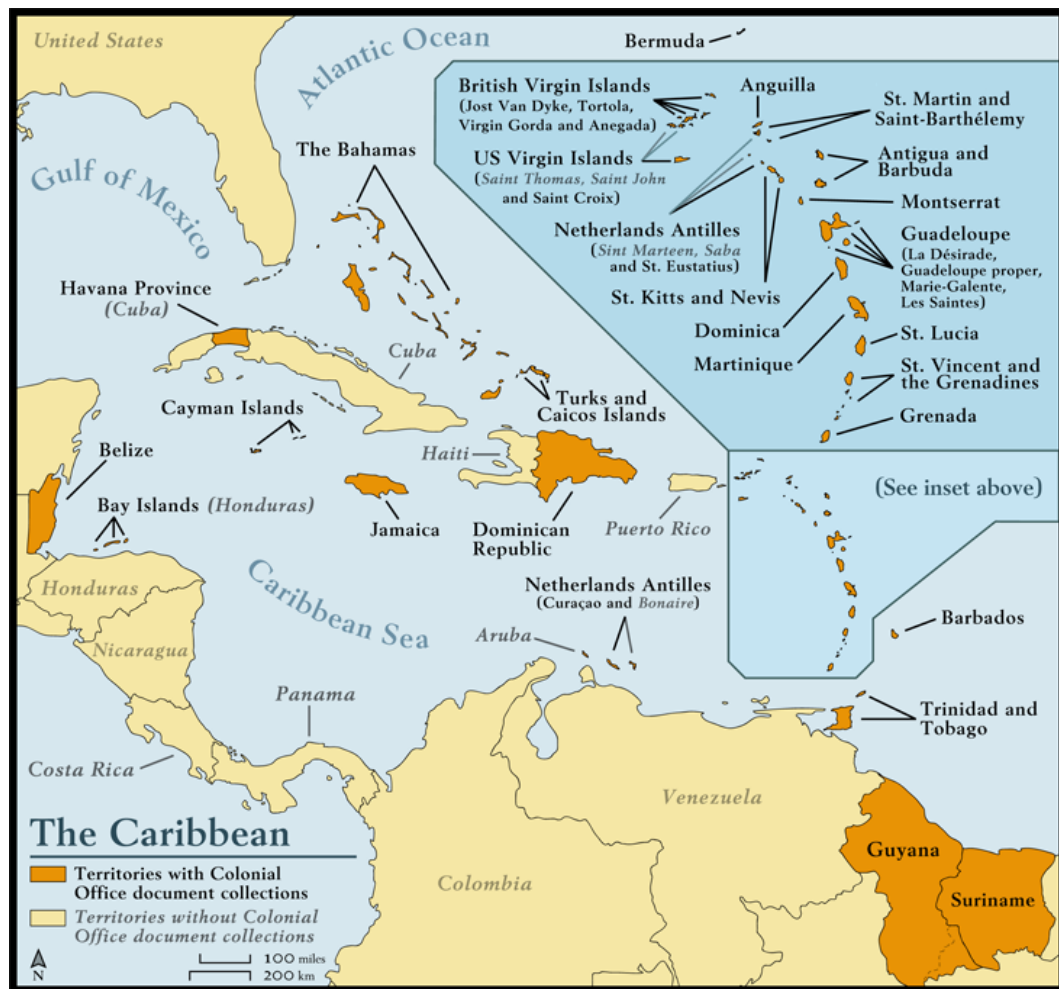


Figure 1.1: A modern map of the Caribbean highlighting the geographical location of Bermuda, the Turks and Caicos Islands (formerly Turks Islands) and the Bahamas. From The National Archives, ‘Map of the Caribbean’, Caribbean Histories Revealed. <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/caribbeanhistory/map-large.htm>> (24 June 2019).

## Salt in the Atlantic World

In Lightbourn’s time, salt was much rarer and more coveted than it is today. In the pre-industrial age, before the rise of modern geology and advanced drilling technologies, extracting salt in quantity was a difficult task. While today salt is found in abundance beneath most continents, during the eighteenth century these deposits were unknown and inaccessible.<sup>6</sup> Instead, salt producers relied on three

<sup>6</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2013), p. 12.



methods of production: if it existed close to the surface, rock salt was mined directly from the ground; if environmental conditions were right, bay-salt was produced through solar evaporation in saltpans and lakes; and if an abundance of fuel was available, boiled or brine-salt was produced through boiling seawater or brine in vats. While today there are over 14,000 different industrial uses for sodium chloride, in the eighteenth century salt was prized for two: food seasoning as a flavouring or condiment and food preservation as a brine pickle or cure.<sup>7</sup> As a food seasoning, salt was ubiquitous.<sup>8</sup> William Brownrigg, a natural philosopher from the eighteenth century, wrote in *The Art of Making Common Salt* that ‘salt has been used by mankind as a seasoning to their food, in all ages, and by all nations’.<sup>9</sup> The type of salt used as a condiment varied, depending on the resources that were available. If a country had a plentiful, easily accessible and pure rock salt, the largest lumps were washed and ground into a fine powder. Those with a more discerning palate, and who could afford it, likely preferred the delicate and status-enhancing *fleur de sel* – the first flakes that formed on the surface of saltpans during the process of making bay-salt. In general, the salt that was driest, whitest and finest tended to be used. In England, this was often a high quality boiled salt.

However, while salt as a seasoning was important, salt’s main role in the pre-industrial era was in food preservation.<sup>10</sup> As salt drew out moisture, killed bacteria and created a barrier to the air, it prevented putrefaction in formerly living plants and animals. In the era before canning and refrigeration, this was the most effective way to ensure food lasted throughout the year, particularly during the winter. Indeed, salt had been used to preserve vegetables in brine pickles for centuries. The Romans, for instance, ‘preserved many vegetables in brine, sometimes with the addition of vinegar, including fennel, asparagus and cabbage’.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, meats were preserved through salt curing. The Church classified almost half the year as ‘lean’, when the consumption of meat

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> William Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt...as now practiced in Most Parts of the World; with several improvements proposed in that art for the use of the British Dominions* (London: C Davis, A Millar and R Dosley, 1748), pp. 157-161.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 161-170.

<sup>11</sup> Kurlansky, *Salt*, p. 67.

was expressly forbidden.<sup>12</sup> As such, salted fish was at the heart of Christian Roman cuisine.<sup>13</sup> While salted herring was the preferred meat substitute during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the discovery of Atlantic cod in the fifteenth century soon flooded the European market.<sup>14</sup> By the eighteenth century, 60 per cent of the fish eaten in Europe was salted cod.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the expansion of Europe's maritime empires from the late fifteenth century created unprecedented demands for salt within and across the Atlantic. Salted fish and meats became essential to provisioning the navies of Europe over these new ocean-going voyages. Cod and herring became so hard when salted and dried they could be 'stacked' easily on ship and transported with little risk of damage.<sup>16</sup> Maritime imperial expansion also saw the rise of enslaved and free colonial populations within the Caribbean. As monoculture agribusiness took root, the sugar islands lost food sovereignty. Those who lived on the plantations increasingly relied on imported salted meats and fish for their protein supplements. Without salt's adequate supply, the bodies of enslaved persons, free colonists, merchants and sailors simply would have ceased to function properly, as foodstuffs putrefied in transit or on the spot.

As such, salt's importance to the provisioning regimes of the Atlantic should not be underestimated. In colonial times, salt was highly sought after. In the Caribbean, seizures of 'salt islands' took place from as early as the late seventeenth century as the Dutch took control of Bonaire, the French and Dutch of St Martin/St Maarten, and the British of Turks Islands. In the British Caribbean, salt production became part of a transatlantic commerce where salt was delivered to North American markets, fashioned into salt cod, beef and pork and shipped back to Caribbean plantations to supplement dietary regimes. This trading cycle was profitable, but it required a particular type of salt. Brownrigg was adamant that salted provisions intended for tropical climates or for ocean crossings needed the strongest salt or most careful pickling to prevent putrefaction.<sup>17</sup> A hard, coarse and strong solar-evaporated bay-salt was the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, pp. 165-166.

preferred choice, explaining why the salt of Turks Islands became so prized. The volume of salt produced there would become truly impressive. By the time of the American Revolution, Turks Islands were producing one fifth of British North America's salt requirements, engaging mercantile networks and colonial societies across the Atlantic littoral.<sup>18</sup>

Salt, then, was by no means exotic or luxury. It was essential in the preservation of large and important Atlantic food chains. Moreover, this commodity chain was driven by the needs of colonists, reminding us that the Atlantic economy was sustained not only through sugar exports satiating the European sweet tooth but also with salted rations filling the bellies of colonial inhabitants. Consequently, Turks Island salt is a commodity of local, regional and Atlantic interest, worthy of further historical investigation.

### **The dominance of sugar**

Other Caribbean commodities, including coffee, chocolate, tobacco and rum, have received more attention than salt. According to Michele Speitz, these commodities represent 'the sweet, the smokey, the exotic and the luxury'.<sup>19</sup> There seems to be something in their pleasurable, exotic, illicit or luxury appeal that prompts continuing interest when counterpoised against the 'common' and 'localised' item of salt. And if any commodity is to be connected with the Caribbean in our mental imageries, undoubtedly sugar bears the immediate association.<sup>20</sup> With good reason, many Caribbean historians have used the sugar plantation to explain significant Caribbean socioeconomic processes.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 397.

<sup>19</sup> Michele Speitz, 'Blood Sugar and Salt Licks: Corroding Bodies and Preserving Nations in The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself', *Circulations: Romanticism and the Black Atlantic*, October 2011. <<https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.speitz.html>> (10 June 2019).

<sup>20</sup> A small selection includes Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Stuart B Schwartz (ed.), *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Carl Plasa, *Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean literatures of Sugar* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Keith Sandiford, *The cultural politics of sugar: Caribbean slavery and narratives of colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Michelle Harrison,

For instance, Sidney Mintz's conception of the Caribbean as one socio-cultural area is based on the fact the region shared a common history of plantations.<sup>21</sup> For Mintz, though the Caribbean lacks a unifying culture, nonetheless 'the societies of the Caribbean...exhibit similarities that cannot possibly be attributed to mere coincidence'.<sup>22</sup> These pan-Caribbean similarities 'consist largely of parallels of economic and social structure and organisation' derived from a similar ecology, the rapid annihilation of indigenous populations and, critically, 'the early definition of the islands as a sphere of European overseas agricultural capitalism, based primarily on *the sugar-cane, African slaves and the plantation system*'.<sup>23</sup> For Mintz, the rise of the sugar plantation complex had significant implications. It saw a type of bipolar social structure mature throughout the Caribbean. It initiated the dynamic interplay of plantations and yeoman agriculture that persists to this day. And, in the wake of emancipation, it prompted the significant importation of foreign labourers from India and China who entered 'the lower sectors of [these] insular social structures, under conditions of extremely restricted opportunities for upward economic, social or political mobility'.<sup>24</sup> These shared historical experiences shaped the societal structures of the sugar islands in similar ways, lending the whole an amount of cohesion.

This classification represents an effort to move away from the idea that the Caribbean was, and remains, a highly fragmented region – culturally, politically, socially and linguistically. However, while Mintz admits 'no attempt to generalise about the entire area can deal adequately with the distinctive features of any single component society', this classification knowingly leaves out those places that never experienced plantation agriculture at all.<sup>25</sup> Those histories have been overlooked and their contributions to Caribbean and Atlantic processes have been marginalised. Moreover, as this thesis will show, studying places that did not experience plantation agriculture need not fragment Caribbean

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*King Sugar: Jamaica, the Caribbean and the world sugar economy* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Sidney Mintz, 'The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 912-937.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 915.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 914.

history further. It nuances our understanding of how different societies, with different economies, related to and relied on one another. Salt drew thousands of enslaved and free colonial inhabitants to Turks Islands, but their history remains somewhat hidden. This thesis makes a case for their inclusion.

### **A challenge to sugar**

This thesis aims to demonstrate that the sucro-centric model of Caribbean historiography cannot, by itself, explain the diversity of social, political and economic processes that occurred within the British Caribbean. It will use the principal salt islands of the British Caribbean – Turks Islands – as a case study and counterpoint. Throughout the chapters, there is an effort to compare and contrast processes that occurred in the salt islands with those that occurred in the sugar islands as well as a demonstration of how these islands inflected each other's development. While colonial societies in the salt islands departed in notable ways from those in the sugar islands, salt also acted as a link between the two by preserving the latter's food. Salt therefore offers a view into a more diverse Caribbean without implying regional disaggregation.

It follows that the history of Turks Islands, and their importance to the British Atlantic world, cannot be understood without recourse to the commodity these islands produced. The discovery and use of the saltpans at Turks Islands set in motion a series of socioeconomic developments that had ramifications not just for the islands in question, but also for Bermuda, the Bahamas and the North American colonies; while concern for protecting and governing these salt islands at times prompted British imperial actors to take a disproportionate interest in their affairs. Without recourse to salt, these histories would not be told. This thesis therefore poses a variety of questions around salt in order to understand the society that matured at Turks Islands: How and why did settlement patterns develop differently around the extraction of salt, in comparison with sugar? Why did Bermuda and the Bahamas engage in a fraught diplomatic dispute over Turks Islands' jurisdiction during the eighteenth century and how was that resolved? What form of political economy developed around salt at Turks Islands, and how and why did it differ from the sugar islands? What distinctive challenges did salt island slavery present to an enslaved salt raker? How and why did these systems

of domination change in the ponds from slavery to freedom? Why did Turks Islands become a watery enclave of empire, better defended than their Out Island neighbours in the Bahamas? And finally, in a period of great food scarcity, why were Turks Islands able to secure more food during the American Revolution compared to their sugar island neighbours, thus averting demographic disaster?

## Geography of Turks Islands

Geographically, Turks Islands lie at the very end of the Bahamian archipelago, to the north of Hispaniola, northeast of Cuba, and southeast of Caicos Islands (See Figures 1.2 and 1.2a). In the eighteenth century, they consisted of two inhabited islands, Grand Turk and Salt Key, and a number of smaller, uninhabited keys, sand banks and rocky outcrops. Grand Turk and Salt Key were small, flat, barren and wind-swept islands, but they had natural salinas that rendered them economically attractive. Being of coralline and limestone formation, they were ringed by hazardous reefs and lacked fresh water. Larger vessels interested in lading salt would need to drop anchor offshore while shallow-drafted sloops ferried in-between.



Figure 1.2: A map of Saint Domingue, 1780. From the David Rumsey Map Collection, G T Raynal, 'Carte de L'Isle de St. Domingue' (Geneva, 1780).

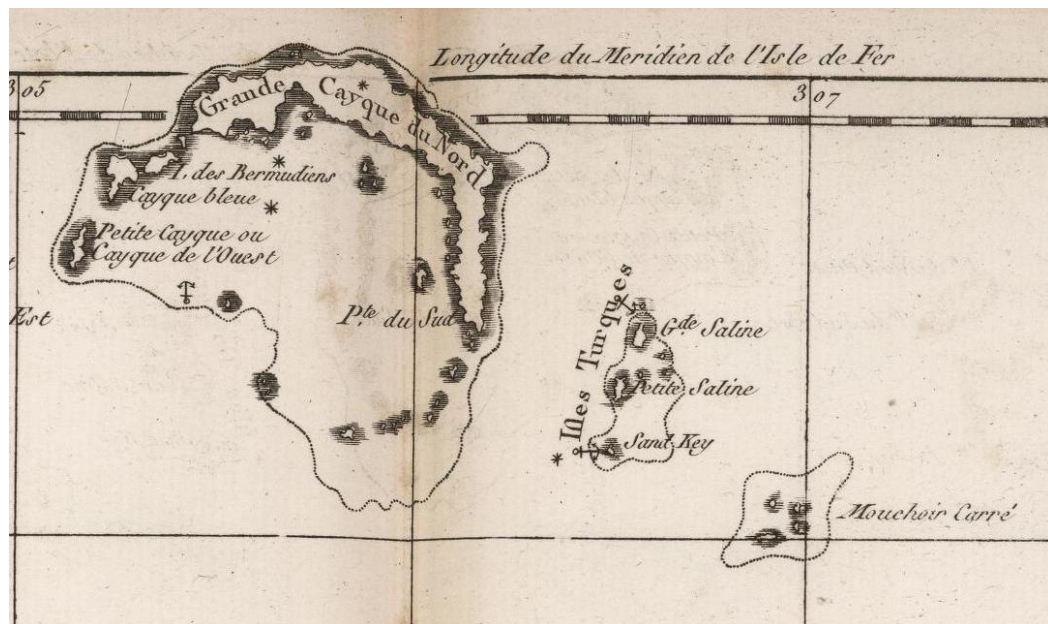


Figure 1.2a. Detail of Turks Islands from a map of Saint Domingue, 1780. From the David Rumsey Map Collection, G T Raynal, 'Carte de L'Isle de St. Domingue' (Geneva, 1780).

### A short chronology of Turks Islands

While Appendix A provides a timeline for reference, a short description of major events discussed within this thesis is presented here. Its chronological scope begins in the 1660s, when Bermudian seafarers first landed at Turks Islands and began to rake salt for trade on an ad-hoc basis. However, as Bermuda's economy took its maritime turn during the late seventeenth century, salt gathering became increasingly important. A form of secondary settlement took place that involved annual and maritime migrations between Bermuda and Turks Islands. While this activity began in a period before Turks Islands were officially claimed, following a French attack in 1764 the British Crown asserted sovereignty over these saline spaces and appointed a new position in the empire: the Turks Islands King's Agent. He was instructed to protect and promote the trade of Turks Islands and he immediately encoded its economic system, the Head Rights System, within regulations. The salt industry subsequently became more structured and stable, and labour passed from free into enslaved hands. During the American Revolution and French Revolutionary Wars, a period of constitutional uncertainty surrounding the status of Turks Islands arose between Bermuda and the Bahamas. In 1803, the British Government ruled in favour of the Bahamas

and Turks Islands entered a period of formal Bahamian rule. The salt industry continued to be profitable, but its white participants were now more likely to permanently reside on Turks Islands and exploit enslaved labour. Following emancipation in 1838, the Head Rights System gave freedmen access to the ponds on the same terms as their former masters, but in 1845 the Head Rights System was purposefully dismantled. New systems of domination emerged in the 1850s. This thesis therefore begins its investigation at the beginning of Turks Islands' settlement and extends to a generation beyond emancipation. However, it most comprehensively covers the second half of the eighteenth century – a period when the salt industry matured and Bermuda's influence over Turks Islands was tested.

## **Chapter overview**

This thesis aims to challenge the explanatory power of sugar in Caribbean historiography by using salt as a lens to explore different historical themes at different analytical scales. There are six thematic chapters arranged into pairs. Each pair approaches Turks Islands' shores from a different spatial scale – regional, local or Atlantic – to track a significant change over time. Chapters 3 and 4 begin by examining issues of Turks Islands' settlement and sovereignty. When Bermudian seafarers initially discovered uninhabited Turks Islands, they set in motion a distinctive maritime, transient and mobile settlement pattern that had few parallels in the British Caribbean. Over time, this created significant inter-island tensions in the region, as both Bermuda and the Bahamas jostled for Turks Islands' jurisdiction. This constitutional crisis festered in the colonies, but in 1803 London reactively intervened. Turks Islands were declared a part of the Bahamas and more traditional settlement patterns took place. While Chapter 3 charts that change through an investigation of the geographical arguments that Bermudians and Bahamians used to support their claims, Chapter 4 delves into the colonial petitions that were sent to London, in order to better understand why the Bermuda Government failed to convince those at the heart of power of its right to Turks Islands. The first pair of chapters therefore charts the emergence, maturation and eventual subsiding of a unique settlement pattern within the



British Caribbean, which owed much of its character to the self-organisation of Bermudian salt gatherers and the commodity they produced.

Having analysed the settlement and jurisdiction of Turks Islands from an inter-island, regional perspective, Chapters 5 and 6 zoom in at a local level to investigate the nature of Turks Islands' political economy and labour system. At a time when a drift towards privatisation might have been expected throughout the British Atlantic world, a curious shared resource system developed around salt at Turks Islands. Chapter 5 seeks to compare the main features of this economic system with that of the sugar islands, while investigating why it emerged and how it was sustained for so long. However, in 1845, the Head Rights System was deliberately dismantled. Chapter 6 charts that change while it strives to tell a story about those who laboured within the companies of the Bermudian salt gatherers: the enslaved salt rakers. Like the sugar plantations, Chapter 6 will argue that the salt industry at Turks Islands always involved unfree labour in some way, but that there were distinct aspects of salt production which defined that labour. This pair of chapters therefore plots the rise and fall of the Head Rights System in order to understand how local systems of domination that existed in slavery persisted in freedom.

Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 pan out to assess the defence and provisioning of Turks Islands within the Britain Atlantic world. Chapter 7 explores the spatiality of British mercantilism to explain how, in the aftermath of a French attack in 1764, imperial and colonial actors reassessed the geopolitical importance of Turks Islands and acted accordingly. From being the most vulnerable 'out' of Out Islands, Turks Islands were transformed into a watery enclave of empire with a King's Agent, capable of defending the islands' salt trade and projecting a 'force-field' over the Windward Passage – a prized route for Jamaica's sugar trade. Chapter 7 therefore traces the emerging importance of Turks Islands to British mercantilism, revealing a socially constructed Caribbean Sea in which specific ocean corridors were coveted. However, British mercantilism was not always successful at Turks Islands. Chapter 8 will question the long-term efficacy of this economic strategy during a period of instability: the American Revolution. Prior to the American Revolution, the salt islands relied heavily on the mainland colonies for food, as did the sugar islands. This dependency did not disappear in the war. But while the American Revolution

proved a disaster for the sugar islands, it did not unfurl in the same way for the salt islands. The salt-provisions trade that existed prior to the American Revolution largely endured. Chapter 8 seeks to explain that endurance and this breach of mercantilism. This last pair of chapters therefore tells a story about the consolidation and subsequent failure of British mercantilism at Turks Islands.

In examining the rise and fall of an unusual settlement pattern, the emergence and dismantling of a unique economic system, and the success and failure of British mercantilism, this thesis pieces together a cis-Atlantic history of Turks Islands that argues salt was central to their settlement, development and position within the British Atlantic world. In the end, all these analytical scales and thematic investigations are necessary to prove that point. All shed light on islands whose economy and society did not rely on sugar and whose history cannot be told through sugar. Salt must take centre stage, not only in explicating the history of Turks Islands, but also in demonstrating that Atlantic littoral societies could be connected in many different ways.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This thesis sits at the intersection of three fields of historiography: Caribbean history, oceanic history and commodity history. In broad terms, it seeks to further research within subfields of Caribbean historiography that look beyond the sugar plantation and to island territories that are often marginalised. Like other commodity histories, it focuses on one item of exchange – salt – as a means to tell multiple, overlapping and trans-local stories of a political, socioeconomic and environmental nature. In doing so, it connects Turks Islands, Bermuda and the Bahamas together with North America, and to a lesser extent Europe, over a ‘terraqueous’ zone that undeniably draws on aspects of Atlantic and oceanic history.<sup>1</sup> To analyse these influences in depth, this chapter follows a structure loosely based around these three historiographical fields, noting their main methodological and theoretical shifts before focusing on the most relevant subfields.

### Caribbean historiography

Caribbean historiography has undergone several significant shifts in its methodological and theoretical ambitions. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, but notable from the 1930s, there was a growth in the number of professionally-trained historians from within the region that began to complement as well as challenge the imperial and Eurocentric focus of metropolitan scholarship, which had long dominated the field. This metropolitan scholarship had almost exclusively focused on the Caribbean’s white slaveholding and merchant classes and valued studying the Caribbean in so far as it contributed to European affairs. The masses of the region’s history – the enslaved population – were rarely addressed. However, with the rise of organised labour movements in the Caribbean seeking greater self-government, if not

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Bashford, ‘Terraqueous histories’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 60 No. 2 (Jun., 2017), pp. 253-272.

independence, this began to change. A ‘creolisation of Caribbean history’ occurred as Caribbean historians responded to the call of activists for an alternative and useable social past for their nationalist aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

The work of C L R James was significant in this regard. A ‘Trinidadian nationalist, member of the Pan-African movement, and Marxist’, James’ history writing fused these elements together.<sup>3</sup> His path-breaking *The Black Jacobins* (1938) complemented his earlier work, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* (1933), and argued that the masses of Caribbean history were worthy of historical study, agents of their history, and capable of declaring immediate independence if they chose, as the enslaved had done during the Haitian Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

Eric Williams, a fellow Trinidadian and contemporary of James, extended this work and has since become a towering figure within modern Caribbean historiography. Graduating with a doctorate from Oxford University in 1938, this historian and politician was one of the first persons of the Caribbean to obtain a doctoral thesis in Caribbean history. His book, *Capitalism & Slavery* (1944), radically challenged the imperialist tradition by arguing the Caribbean should be placed at the centre of narratives on the emergence of the Atlantic system and not at their edge.<sup>5</sup> Like James, Williams wanted to nurture the Afro-Caribbean’s ‘psychological esteem and self worth’, asking him or her to take pride in their history of slavery by pointing out it was enslaved persons who had contributed most to Europe’s economic prowess.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bridget Brereton, ‘Regional Histories’, in B W Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1999), 6, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco A Scarano, ‘Slavery and Emancipation in Caribbean History’, in B W Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1999), 6, p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> C L R James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’ouverture and the San Domingo revolution* (with a new introduction by James Walvin, London: Penguin, 2001). C L R James, *The case of West-Indian self government* (New York: University Place Book Shop, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (with a new introduction by Colin A Palmer, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> James Millette, ‘Nationalism and Imperialism in Caribbean History’, in B W Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1999), 6, p. 191.

Together, these and other scholars inaugurated a new phase of Caribbean history that emphasised prioritising the history of the majority – the enslaved population – over the minority – the white slaveholding and merchant elite. This shift in focus accelerated with the rise of Black Power movements in the 1960s and 1970s and once island territories began to achieve independence. It also gained impetus from changes occurring within metropolitan scholarship. From within western universities came the rise of the new social history and its attendant ambition to write for the ‘people without history’ or ‘history from below’. Consequently, a combination of internal developments and external influence saw the direction of Caribbean historiography change. At root grew the radical idea, captured in Franklin Knight’s *The Caribbean* (1978), that the Caribbean was worthy of study for its own sake and not necessarily because of its place within other European countries’ histories.<sup>7</sup> This was a concerted act to de-centre Europe and centre the Caribbean in its history-telling. It would have a lasting effect.

Elsa Goveia’s history of slave society in the British Leeward Islands was an early and impressive example of this new type of scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Goveia argued that the structure of slave society was upheld by a pervasive regime of violence and coercion that permeated all social interactions and institutions. Not only did she perceive race as the preeminent marker of difference within Caribbean society, she was also one of the first Caribbean historians to utilise the concept of hegemony in order to explain the longevity of a social structure that had, over time, made the separation of the races appear ‘natural’ to contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> At a similar time, Philip Curtin’s *Two Jamaicas* (1955) posited a dualist interpretation of Caribbean society on the eve of emancipation, which described the dominant cultural group – the white Europeans – as holding ideas and beliefs about a future free Jamaica that contrasted irreconcilably with those of the subordinate cultural group consisting of the enslaved (pre-1834), apprenticed (from 1834)

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<sup>7</sup> Franklin W Knight, *The Caribbean, the genesis of a fragmented nationalism* (3rd edn, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Elsa Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> Scarano, ‘Slavery and Emancipation’, p. 261.

and freed black masses (from 1838).<sup>10</sup> However, this dualist interpretation increasingly came under scholarly criticism for failing to explain adequately how new societies form in areas of cross-cultural encounter.<sup>11</sup> Edward Braithwaite subsequently introduced his idea of ‘creolisation’, urging scholars to understand the different sectors of Caribbean society as consistently reframing each other, forming a new society out of their encounter that was neither European nor African, but a creative new synthesis.<sup>12</sup> While their arguments and research foci differed, Goveia, Curtin and Braithwaite all shared a desire to unpack the history of Caribbean society for its own sake.

Caribbean historiography therefore shifted from a traditional emphasis on the governance, political and institutional history of the elites to focusing more on economic and social histories of the actual structure and inner workings of colonial society, the agency of the enslaved and, since the 1960s, the wider importance of the plantation as a production system. Indeed, the plantation as a social and economic organising principle for understanding Caribbean society has acquired a distinguished position within its historiography. For many scholars, such as Gordon K Lewis and Sidney Mintz, the unity of the region is predicated upon its sharing common historical experiences that have created uniformity in the structural organisation of society.<sup>13</sup> In this, the experience of plantation monoculture – specifically sugar – has often been considered paramount. This research agenda was pushed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Plantation Economy School, which sought to support the nationalist, anticolonial movements and ‘facilitate structural change’ by establishing an ‘indigenous political economy’ for the Caribbean based around the plantation.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as Hilary Beckles argues, ‘modern Caribbean economic history begins with the

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<sup>10</sup> Philip D Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Scarano, ‘Slavery and Emancipation’, p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Gordon K Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 3. Sidney Mintz, ‘The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area’, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 912-937.

<sup>14</sup> Hilary McD Beckles, ‘Economic Interpretations of Caribbean History’, in B W Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1999), 6, p. 89.

plantation'.<sup>15</sup> It is now 'the preeminent lens by which scholars have understood the area's social, economic and political currents', gaining its staying power partly in the way it complements other historiographies such as imperial history (with its 'emphasis on each European power's sugar holdings'), nationalist history (with its search for commonalities in order to unify the region), and slavery history (with its focus on the enslaved masses).<sup>16</sup> Many historians from a variety of subfields continue to delve into this institution to explain the region's history.

However, in the last twenty years, the field has opened up. There has been a proliferation of monographs and articles on Caribbean history from both within and outside the region engaging in an increasing variety of topics and themes from slavery, the slave trade and the African diaspora to women and gender and environmental history, often mirroring developments arising in metropolitan scholarship. For the purposes of this thesis, there are three sub-fields of particular relevance.

#### *Alternative spaces of slavery*

While plantations were 'dominant' in the Caribbean, they were 'not omnipresent' and in recent decades there has been a notable shift to research the lives of those who worked beyond the limits of the plantation.<sup>17</sup> According to Jesse Cromwell, 'current scholarship demonstrates that the narrative of plantation-driven development cannot, by itself, explain the diverse historical experiences of Caribbean life'.<sup>18</sup> Within the sugar-producing island of Jamaica, Verene Shepherd has demonstrated in *Livestock, Sugar and Slavery* (2009) that both prior to the establishment of sugar plantations, and during their apogee, the island contained many cattle-pens of varying size, often small but sometimes as large as a plantation.<sup>19</sup> Once the sugar revolution took root, these cattle-pens

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jesse Cromwell, 'More than Slaves and Sugar: Recent Historiography of the Trans-Imperial Caribbean and Its Sinew Populations', *History Compass*, Vol. 12 No. 10 (Oct., 2014), p. 770.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 778.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 771.

<sup>19</sup> Verene A Shepherd, *Livestock, Sugar and Slavery: contested terrain in colonial Jamaica* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009).

adapted to supply the livestock needs of the plantations and often employed enslaved labourers. Sometimes, planters even hired-in these enslaved labourers from the cattle-pens to mitigate their high labour demands during the sugar harvest. Consequently, Shepherd keenly demonstrates the importance of this subsidiary industry to sustaining the sugar plantations, which is often overlooked in plantation historiography, while making a point of variegating our understanding of how enslaved people lived in Jamaica.

Other scholars have begun to unpack the lives of urban enslaved people that differed in important ways from those of the rural plantation. An early example is geographer Colin Clarke's *Kingston, Jamaica* (1975).<sup>20</sup> This was the first study of a port-town in the British Caribbean, and sought to explain the poor infrastructure development of modern Kingston in light of its historical trajectory and early social stratification that was expressed spatially. Clarke explains how the influx of free people of colour and enslaved people prompted the local white elites to resituate their dwellings on the hills surrounding the town, leaving its centre and inner neighbourhoods for those of a lower socioeconomic and differing racial class. Consequently, those with spending power did little to invest in the city's public buildings and infrastructure development. Similarly, in *Slave Society in the City* (2004), Pedro Welch provides a detailed study of a port-town in the colonial period as he mines the archives of Bridgetown in Barbados.<sup>21</sup> However, whereas Clarke is interested in spatial analysis and racial segregation with a view to its implications for infrastructure development, Welch focuses on the ways free people of colour and enslaved persons were able to carve out more autonomous roles and spaces for themselves in this urban setting when compared to the rural plantation.

Work on alternative spaces of slavery has also taken scholars to islands and enclaves that did not produce sugar at all. Jennifer Anderson's *Mahogany* (2012) is a skilful synthesis of this wood's commodity chain, which from the mid-eighteenth century saw a new form of slavery increasingly develop in the

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<sup>20</sup> Colin G Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: urban development and social change, 1692-1962* (London: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Pedro L V Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados 1680-1834* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004).



jungles of British Honduras (modern-day Belize).<sup>22</sup> Compared to the sugar plantation, slavery in the mahogany industry involved smaller gangs of enslaved persons who made temporary camps in the jungle during the woodcutting season. Though they experienced relatively little supervision as they explored the jungle in search of suitable trees to cut, Anderson is clear this was hard, arduous and dangerous work in a foreboding environment that contemporary consumers of decorated mahogany cabinets would have been largely unaware.

Anderson's foray into the lives of transient enslaved woodcutters is complemented by a growing body of work that researches another category of mobile and migrating enslaved labourers: enslaved sailors. Their greater mobility and interaction with shipboard and onshore communities shaped their experience of slavery in distinctive ways. While Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh explore these dynamics aboard large ships and in port towns in *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000), Michael Jarvis offers an alternative view from the decks of small family-owned sloops within Bermuda's merchant fleet that became important freight carriers within the Caribbean region during the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> As Caribbean historiography continues to take this turn to the sea, still more research can be expected on those who were enslaved and working in a multitude of maritime trades: from pearl diving, turtling and whaling to droghing, wrecking and privateering.

This thesis has been inspired by this literature to move beyond the plantation and assesses slavery in the context of the saltpans that developed on Turks Islands during the eighteenth century. It offers salt island slavery as a counterpoint to sugar island slavery and pays serious attention to how salt and Turks Islands' environment shaped the lives of those who lived there.

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<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Anderson, *Mahogany: the costs of luxury in early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). Michael J Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 49 No. 3 (Jul., 2002), pp. 585-622.

### *Sinew populations*

This shift away from the sugar plantation to study the diverse lives of enslaved people in other settings is also reflected in a scholarly interest to recover what Cromwell calls the Caribbean's 'sinew populations': those colonial inhabitants who lived beyond the plantation and who were often 'neither masters nor slaves'.<sup>24</sup> For Cromwell, 'despite planters' attempts to essentialise race, class, legal status and occupation into their simplest forms, a broad body of historical actors resisted and coexisted with the plantation complex and reshaped the designs of empire in the process'.<sup>25</sup> Although by no means an exhaustive list, these sinew populations could include urban dwellers, merchants, smugglers, sailors and soldiers. Sinew populations often moved between islands and across imperial borders or between the sugar plantations and the urban towns, creating 'alternative geographies' as they navigated the Greater Caribbean.<sup>26</sup> In so doing, they also formed 'the connective tissue of European projects in the region', 'inadvertently prevent[ing] highly unequal and artificial societies from collapsing'.<sup>27</sup> These were often white colonists who have been marginalised within 'the narrative of plantation-driven development' as a result of their lower economic status and alternative pursuits.<sup>28</sup>

Since the 1980s and 1990s, one sinew population that has gained more attention has been smugglers involved in contraband trade and its proliferation. There is now widespread recognition that illicit trade was endemic to the Caribbean. While European maritime empires adhered to an economic policy of mercantilism in theory, in practice the opportunity for profit, the geographical proximity of neighbouring islands, and the material demands of the colonists themselves often resulted in commodities crossing imperial boundaries. The range of topics pursued underneath this umbrella has varied but recently there has been a trend towards understanding the smuggler's 'integral place in a web of social connections that linked together subjects, colonial administration and

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<sup>24</sup> Cromwell, 'More than Slaves and Sugar', p. 771.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 770.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 773.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 770.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

trans-imperial spaces'.<sup>29</sup> This holistic approach often asks questions about colonial identity construction as a result of inter-imperial trade. For example, Linda Rupert's *Creolisation and Contraband* (2012) assesses cultural formation in Dutch Curaçao during the early-modern period.<sup>30</sup> It tracks how Curaçao became a centre of illicit trade and argues that this contributed towards a process of creolisation as smugglers from different parts of the Atlantic coalesced on its main town, Willemstad, and interacted with its multi-ethnic population of free black people, enslaved persons and Sephardic Jews. As a result, Rupert contends that, far from being just an interesting sideshow, illicit trade was fundamental to the construction of colonial society in Curaçao.

Similarly, in *In the Eye of All Trade* (2010), Jarvis traces the smuggling activities of Bermudian seafarers but he does so alongside the other maritime activities that free and enslaved Bermudians engaged in across the Atlantic region.<sup>31</sup> By focusing on this maritime economy, as opposed to Bermuda's agriculture and ailing tobacco plantations, Jarvis is able to weave a narrative that resituates Bermuda as a centre of trade within the Atlantic. Like Rupert, Bermuda's sinew populations – its maritime seafarers – were critical for the island's socioeconomic development. Moreover, as freight carriers they played an important role connecting different littoral societies of the Caribbean and American coastline together. Without these stories, our understanding of the 'connective tissue[s]' of empire would be poorer.

The main protagonists of this thesis are sinew populations: Bermudian salt gatherers, salt merchants and their enslaved labourers who congregated around and within Turks Islands in pursuit of salt. These colonial inhabitants are some of the most underrated of the Caribbean's sinew populations but the role they played was important. During the period under study, Turks Islands became an invaluable source of salt for preserving the protein supplements that ultimately fed inhabitants of the thirteen colonies and the British Caribbean's sugar plantations. In the effort to acquire sustenance, salt was a vital ingredient. As such, the exertions of Bermudian salt gatherers, merchants and enslaved salt

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 772.

<sup>30</sup> Linda M Rupert, *Creolisation and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Michael J Jarvis, *In The Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

rakers to colonise Turks Islands and nurture their saltpans into maximum productivity deserve a better place within Caribbean historiography. It adds richness to our understanding of diverse Caribbean processes, without which another ‘connective tissue’ of empire would be missed.

By studying those people – enslaved and free – who lived and worked beyond the plantation, scholars can learn more about the ‘commercial dynamism’ of the Caribbean, the diversity of the region’s social groups and the value of islands that were perhaps more useful for their strategic significance than their extractive purposes yet still important in the functioning of the whole.<sup>32</sup> In particular, scholars know relatively little about the maritime and migratory labourers of the Caribbean and of the Atlantic, but they were arguably far more important for the populations they served than the similarly mobile but often destructive pirates and privateers who have received more scholarly attention.<sup>33</sup>

### *Regional and pan-Caribbean history*

One of the most challenging aspects of writing Caribbean history is the linguistic, political and cultural fragmentation of the region that arises from the divisions created through its imperial legacies and African influences. Indeed, the idea of fragmentation is a key concept within the historiography. This can make writing pan-Caribbean history a difficult task as primary sources are scattered in metropolitan and island archives and the level of linguistic dexterity required often exceeds the historian’s abilities. Nonetheless, there is a belief that, despite its fragmentation, the Caribbean region should, and *must*, be considered as one socio-cultural area with shared historical experiences.<sup>34</sup> Many scholars argue colonial inhabitants did not experience the Caribbean as a peripheral, isolated place, but an inter-connected inter-imperial region.<sup>35</sup> As such, there is a need for more pan-Caribbean histories that authentically reflect this fact. These histories are not narrow in theme, chronological period or geographical expanse

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<sup>32</sup> Cromwell, ‘More than Slaves and Sugar’, p. 771.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 778.

<sup>34</sup> Scarano, ‘Slavery and Emancipation’, p. 234.

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Finucane, ‘Trade and organisation in the colonial Caribbean’, *History Compass*, Vol. 16 No. 7 (Jul., 2018), p. 2.

but tend to focus on large-scale processes within a ‘Greater Caribbean’.<sup>36</sup> While definitions of ‘Greater Caribbean’ shift over time, often at the discretion of the historian, it tends to encompass the islands of the Caribbean and those mainland enclaves such as Guiana and Belize that shared similar historical trajectories to, and active connections with, the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup> Knight’s *The Caribbean* is an example of how such a pan-Caribbean history can be written, privileging no one territory or chronological period but rather attending to common themes that have shaped the region. Pan-Caribbean histories have also been utilised to frame environmental and ecological histories that cross imperial divides. For example, David Watt’s *The West Indies* (1990) charts the rapid and irreversible environmental transformations following the rise of the sugar plantation complex across the Greater Caribbean; while J R McNeill’s *Mosquito Empires* (2010) traces the fatal impact of pathogenic forces that were exacerbated by the spread of sugar plantations and European imperial wars.<sup>38</sup>

However, while there are calls for more inter-imperial pan-Caribbean histories, there is also a need for more regional histories that focus on more than one territory but are not necessarily inter-imperial. According to Bridget Brereton, such regional histories study ‘the origins and development of a significant group of Caribbean territories, paying some attention to the wider regional context, and taking a similarly broad chronological sweep’.<sup>39</sup> They tend to resist rigid periodisation and are lead by unifying themes that emphasise inter-island connections and shared histories. Within the English-speaking Caribbean, there is a need for more research on territories other than Jamaica, which receives the greatest scholarly attention, to include more marginalised islands and their agglomerations.<sup>40</sup>

This thesis seeks to respond to that need. As a point of departure, it extends its gaze to the salt-producing islands of Turks Islands and their strong

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<sup>36</sup> Brereton, ‘Regional Histories’, p. 308.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 310-321.

<sup>38</sup> David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). J R McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean 1620-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Brereton, ‘Regional Histories’, p. 308.

<sup>40</sup> Christer Petley, ‘New Perspectives on Slavery and Emancipation in the British Caribbean’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 54 No. 3 (Sept., 2011), p. 877.

inter-island relationships with Bermuda and the Bahamas that changed dramatically over the course of a century and a half. According to Michael Craton, Turks Islands and the Bahamas have some of the most underdeveloped historiographies within the region.<sup>41</sup> Of Turks Islands his outlook is particularly bleak: ‘The Turks and Caicos Islands’ case is sorry indeed; historically the most marginalised of all Caribbean territories and still the closest to being without an historiography whatsoever’.<sup>42</sup> While Bermuda’s historiography has benefited from Jarvis’ *In the Eye of All Trade*, nonetheless more could be done to bring it from the edges of Caribbean historiography; a position it surely deserves given its historically rich connections to the region. In addition to these three islands of the British Caribbean, this thesis also assesses Turks Islands’ – at times fractious – relationship with French Saint Domingue (Chapter 7) and its co-dependent relationship with the mainland colonies during the American Revolution (Chapter 8). By attending to these different littoral societies in one narrative, this thesis aims to tell a story that is regional in scope but with a firm footing in Turks Islands in order to demonstrate there is value in studying marginalised islands particularly when their inter-island histories are taken into account.

In producing inter-island and regional histories, the maritime spaces in-between become an important site of study. They call on historians to question how the sea itself plays a role in shaping human relations and societal development. Consequently, regional and pan-Caribbean histories often cross-pollinate with oceanic histories.

## **Oceanic histories**

Since the 1990s, there has been a profusion of studies that self-consciously associate with oceanic histories. Though the historiographical inspiration of oceanic history is older, with forays into Indian Ocean history, Pacific Ocean history, Mediterranean history and Atlantic history pre-dating this decade, a ‘growing environmental and global sensibility’ saw an expansion of scholarship

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Craton, ‘Historiography of the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands, Cayman Islands and Belize’, in B W Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1999), 6, p. 666.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 675.

in the 1990s that accelerated with the decision of the United Nations to create a World Oceans Day in 2008.<sup>43</sup> In this context, oceans have done, and continue to do, much ‘discursive work’ for the United Nations, advancing the idea of a ‘single world ocean’ that can unify a politically-divided terrestrial world, at a time when ocean management and conservation is becoming increasingly urgent.<sup>44</sup> This single world ocean, this ‘blue planet’, argues there is a ‘shared oceanic heritage’ among terrestrial societies and that the rise of globalisation is owed significantly, though not exclusively, to the connection of the oceans through European maritime expansion.<sup>45</sup> Oceanic history is therefore an important, even fundamental, way to tell global history through a focus on its maritime regions.

By refocusing our attention on the watery margins of coastlines and their interactions with each other and the sea, oceanic history offers an escape from what Martin W Lewis and Kären Wigen call the ‘myth of continents’ and the tendency towards ‘terracentricism’ within area studies that directed world history after the Second World War.<sup>46</sup> In oceanic history, it is assumed ‘littoral societies often shared more in common with similar formations and oceans than they did with their own nearby hinterlands’.<sup>47</sup> It is an exercise in ‘trans-local studies’ that seeks to deprioritise the nation and the notion of hermetically sealed empires.<sup>48</sup>

Unsurprisingly, oceanic history takes the ocean seriously. In maritime history, traditional analysis focuses on ships, their navigation technologies and human activities aboard those ships. Oceanic history, however, asks for more cross-pollination between maritime and environmental history so that the sea is brought into this equation. It explores ‘the complex relations between elements (wind, tides, currents), ocean life (mammals, fish, crustaceans, birds, plants) and human activity in or on the seas’.<sup>49</sup> This ‘turn to the sea’ also reflects the rise of

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<sup>43</sup> Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford and David Armitage, ‘Introduction: Writing World Oceanic Histories’, in David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Martin W Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Sivasundaram, Bashford and Armitage, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

the blue humanities within academic institutions and the shifts within environmental movements from ‘green’ to ‘blue’ issues.<sup>50</sup> It is this combination of maritime and environmental history that makes oceanic history distinctive.

Oceanic histories are also attentive to the balance that exists between integration and fragmentation when studying the world oceans. While there is a tendency to emphasise connection and coherence within global history, this focus does not capture all human experience within the world oceans. Indeed, ‘seas oscillate between objecthood and fragmentation, internal coherence and transoceanic connection, openness and closure’.<sup>51</sup> While many oceanic histories ‘from Braudel in the 1940s to Bailyn in the early 2000s’ would argue that oceans performed primarily as connectors of society, a growing cohort of scholars are now considering the ways oceans, and seas within oceans, were segmented into ‘multiple micro-environments’.<sup>52</sup> This ‘revisionist pluralism’ means oceanic history does not ‘essentialise or classify the seas of the world as spaces set apart from each other, nor does it prioritise the spatial scale of the global over the micro-regional, the whole ocean over the little sea’.<sup>53</sup> Rather oceanic history allows room for historians who share a common interest in human-sea interactions to choose the geographical scale that is most suitable for their subject of study.

As there are multiple oceans and seas within the ‘single world ocean’, it follows there are a number of subfields – from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea – that historians have attended to. One of the most prolific, and most relevant to this thesis, is Atlantic history.

### *Atlantic history*

Atlantic history focuses on the history of the four continents surrounding the Atlantic Ocean and their interaction with this maritime space from roughly 1500-1800. The historiographical roots of Atlantic history have both political and academic origins. Following the Second World War, Walter Lippmann, a

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 17.



prominent American journalist, advised the American Government to embrace the idea of an Atlantic community in order to bring the United States out of its isolationism and pursue a more productive foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> This was the era of building international institutions, such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and ‘the geopolitical expression of an Atlantic community’ brought a sense of unity to the western world.<sup>55</sup> Though it first appeared ‘as a historical entity in the writings of diplomats’, in the 1970s it entered academic historiography.<sup>56</sup> At that time, historians, such as Richard Dunn, who were interested in both early-modern English and American history, found it difficult to situate themselves within literatures that treated these as two separate fields.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, there were those, like Jack Green, who believed there was a fundamental problem within American historiography that understood its early history merely as a ‘prelude to the real thing’, i.e. the foundation of the United States following the American Revolution.<sup>58</sup> There was therefore a push to study the history of the thirteen colonies for their own sake and a realisation that these colonial societies had more in common with early-modern Europe than the American society that followed revolution.<sup>59</sup> In the 1970s, these currents converged to form the new field of colonial British America, which emphasised transatlantic connections between Europe and North America.<sup>60</sup>

However, there was a growing concern that Africa and enslaved people did not feature in this story. This flaw revealed itself in R R Palmer’s *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1964), which provided a synchronised account of the growth of democracy in both Europe and North America but said little on the subject of slavery.<sup>61</sup> In order to address that omission, some historians began to

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<sup>54</sup> David Armitage, ‘The Atlantic Ocean’, in David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 92-93.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Canny, ‘Writing Atlantic History; or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86 No. 3, (Dec., 1999), p. 1095.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 1096.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 1099.

<sup>61</sup> R R Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (2 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964).

pursue a larger Atlantic frame for their research questions. Studies of slavery, the slave trade and the black diaspora were arguably the first truly Atlantic histories to emerge. An early, salient example was Curtin's masterful *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1969) that knitted the Atlantic together through its pursuit of the slave trade.<sup>62</sup> Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) was also path breaking by following a narrative that was neither African nor British nor American nor Caribbean.<sup>63</sup> Instead, it related the development and spread of the Atlantic's black diaspora from a non-national point of view. The focus of these new Atlantic historians was consistently on the commonalities, convergences, connections, and circulations that existed between the littoral societies of the Atlantic. They naturally expected the answers to questions they asked in one place might be found elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> And because Atlantic histories often tracked broad social and economic shifts, they tended to incorporate large-scale processes, across broad spaces, over long periods of time.

An outcome of this new Atlantic history was an appreciable re-centring of the Caribbean within the historiography of British America, with early American scholars keen to explore the socioeconomic, cultural and political relationships that developed between British America and the West Indies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. For Trevor Burnard, this shift restored 'the British West Indies to its rightful position as the most dynamic part of British America'.<sup>65</sup> It represented a 'Caribbeanisation of American history' where the islands were appreciated as centres of the Atlantic system, instead of peripheral outposts.<sup>66</sup> Early examples of such Caribbean-centred Atlantic histories can be found in Williams' *Capitalism & Slavery* and James' *The Black Jacobins*, but a more recent example is Vincent Brown's *The Reaper's Garden* (2010).<sup>67</sup> This is a haunting tale of the cultural, social and political importance of death in Jamaica, an island that experienced high levels of mortality amongst all

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<sup>62</sup> Philip D Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

<sup>63</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>64</sup> Alison Games, 'From the Editor: Introduction, Definitions, and Historiography: What Is Atlantic History?', *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 18 No. 3 (Apr., 2004), p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Trevor Burnard quoted in Petley, 'New Perspectives', p. 868.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 871.

<sup>67</sup> Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the world of Atlantic slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

sectors of its population. While it is a story about Jamaica, Brown's conclusions are Atlantic in scope, demonstrating that Jamaica's experience of death – and the systems of domination and terror that surrounded it – was not anomalous but 'representative of early America'.<sup>68</sup>

As the 1990s progressed, Atlantic history experienced an explosion of scholarship, spurred on by Harvard University's International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World under the coordination of Bernard Bailyn. So prolific was its output that by the start of the twenty-first century, Atlantic history was briefly considered a field of history in its own right. Though Atlantic history would be subsumed under oceanic history as the 2010s progressed, the continued proliferation of studies that take an Atlantic framework demonstrate the subfield is in good health. There are now several recognised ways of writing Atlantic history that David Armitage has usefully defined. Four have informed the writing of this thesis.

In *The British Atlantic World* (2009), Armitage outlines three approaches to writing Atlantic history.<sup>69</sup> The most ambitious is circum-Atlantic history, which refers to broad syntheses that try to approach Atlantic history holistically, placing emphasis on inter-imperial connections and 'the Atlantic as a particular zone of exchange and interchange, circulation and transmission'.<sup>70</sup> While such a broad synthesis is not the focus of this thesis, and is beyond the remit of many Atlantic histories, it remains an aspiring goal that the subfield gravitates towards. The second approach is trans-Atlantic history. This is "the history of the Atlantic world told through comparisons" between empires, nations, states and similar communities or formations, such as cities or plantations' and throughout this thesis there is an attempt to engage in trans-Atlantic history by using salt as a counterpoint to sugar in order to bring into sharp relief the variegated experiences of Caribbean life.<sup>71</sup> However, undoubtedly, this thesis most strongly engages with the third approach that Armitage describes: cis-Atlantic history.

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<sup>68</sup> Petley, 'New Perspectives', p. 871.

<sup>69</sup> David Armitage, 'Three Concepts of Atlantic History', in David Armitage and Michael J Braddick (eds), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (2nd edn, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 13-29.

<sup>70</sup> David Armitage quoted in Armitage, 'The Atlantic Ocean', p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp. 96-97.

Cis-Atlantic history is written from the viewpoint of one particular place, exploring its multifaceted connections with the wider Atlantic world and how its societal development may have been affected by its position within that world. Though many Atlantic histories do focus on large-scale process, across broad spaces, over long periods of time, as Nicholas Canny states, ‘that does not mean the only subjects are those that can be painted with a broad canvas’.<sup>72</sup> Within Atlantic history, local studies can coexist with broader syntheses, as long as they acknowledge that these places are embedded within larger networks and owe part of their character to Atlantic forces running through/within/out of them. As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen put it, we must understand ‘each space shot through with a multiplicity of entangled actors’.<sup>73</sup> In colonial societies, there was always this interplay between the local, the regional and the Atlantic. It follows it is also possible to write Atlantic history of the British Atlantic world or the French Atlantic world, so long as one understands these were more ‘spheres of influence’ than hard-edged, sealed-off entities.<sup>74</sup>

April Lee Hatfield’s *Atlantic Virginia* (2007) is an excellent example of a cis-Atlantic history that seeks to debunk the myth that the American colonies of the seventeenth century had little contact with one another or the wider hemisphere, apart from indirectly via London.<sup>75</sup> Instead, through following the movement of goods, people and trade, along rivers and across the Atlantic Ocean, Hatfield demonstrates how early Virginia was entwined in many Atlantic networks that contributed to its development.

While at times this thesis does move beyond the shores of Turks Islands to Bermuda, the Bahamas and the mainland colonies, predominantly it is anchored within Turks Islands and narrates a cis-Atlantic history that faces both inwards and outwards. Through an investigation of the settlement of Turks Islands, the development of its political economy, and the islands’ defence and provisioning networks, it continuously explores what was particular to Turks Islands and what was regional and Atlantic in scope. Like Hatfield’s Virginia, it

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<sup>72</sup> Canny, ‘Writing Atlantic History’, p. 1108.

<sup>73</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, ‘Hybrid Atlantics: Future Directions for the History of the Atlantic World’, *History Compass*, Vol. 11 No. 8 (Aug., 2013), p. 602.

<sup>74</sup> Canny, ‘Writing Atlantic History’, p. 1109-1111.

<sup>75</sup> April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

contends that all these perspectives – local, regional and Atlantic – are necessary in order to sympathetically explicate the colonial society that developed around salt production and trade from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Consequently, this thesis pays serious attention to the forces that operated at different scales through, within and back out of these islands. They are all given equal space in its analysis: the Atlantic is not prioritised over the local; the local is not prioritised over the regional. In the end, this produces a narrative that is neither endogenous nor exogenous. It acknowledges Christer Petley's suggestion that 'whatever their geographical frame of reference or specific field of interest, Caribbeanists must continue to look both inwards and outwards in order to make sense of local societies and to understand their wider importance'.<sup>76</sup> A cis-Atlantic history of Turks Islands is an effective means towards that goal.

There are two more approaches to Atlantic history that this thesis takes into account, which are of more recent origin. By 2018, Atlantic history had sustained scholarly criticism for ignoring the ocean itself and for indulging in methodological separatism: treating the Atlantic as a bounded entity when it was connected to other oceans and failing to incorporate methodologies from its peers' historiographies.<sup>77</sup> As this was problematic, Atlantic history had to reorient, adapt and recognise its position as a subfield of oceanic history. Consequently, its future now looks brighter and Armitage has added three more approaches to Atlantic history that reflect this greater dialogue with oceanic historiography. These additional approaches are: infra-Atlantic history, sub-Atlantic history and extra-Atlantic history.<sup>78</sup> Though this thesis does not engage with extra-Atlantic history (which seeks to uncover the transoceanic connections

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<sup>76</sup> Petley, 'New Perspectives', p. 880.

<sup>77</sup> Armitage, 'The Atlantic Ocean', pp. 88-89. For studies debating the methodological and theoretical problems facing Atlantic history, see Canny, 'Writing Atlantic History'; Alison Games, 'Atlantic Constraints and Global Opportunities', *History Compass*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (2003), pp. 1-4; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Some Caveats about the "Atlantic" Paradigm', *History Compass*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (2003), pp. 1-4; Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 111 No. 3 (Jun., 2006), pp. 741-757; Patrick Griffin, 'A Plea for a New Atlantic History', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 68 No. 2 (Apr., 2001), pp. 236-239; and Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 'Hybrid Atlantics', pp. 597-609.

<sup>78</sup> Armitage, 'The Atlantic Ocean', pp. 96-108.

between the Atlantic and the other world oceans), both the perspectives represented by sub- and infra-Atlantic history have played a role.

In accordance with oceanic histories, sub-Atlantic history takes the ocean more seriously by researching into human activities that occur on or below the waterline and the impact these have on marine ecology. It also calls on historians to consider how the elements of the oceans and its marine life have historically moulded and shaped human activity on and in the seas.<sup>79</sup> As such, the ocean has a larger role to play in Atlantic history writing and this thesis has endeavoured to reflect that trend. Not only is salt a literal product of the ocean – sea water was pumped through sluices and gates into salt pans for solar-evaporation – but it had widespread and powerful consequences for the Turks Island environment, its soil fertility, its settlement and the health of those who were forced to work within it. Moreover, the elements of the ocean – the direction and force of its winds, currents and storms – heavily influenced the sailing approaches to Turks Islands, aiding the journeys of Bermudians who sailed between Bermuda and Turks Islands, but hindering travel between New Providence and the same. Moreover, the location of Turks Islands next to a major shipping lane – the Windward Passage – had serious implications for the islands’ defence and the region’s geopolitical security. All of these features and characteristics of the seas surrounding Turks Islands are attended to within this thesis.

Finally, infra-Atlantic history reflects a new trend that can be witnessed across oceanic histories. It is the ‘inverse of circum-Atlantic history’ and holds there are certain sub-seas and sub-regions of the Atlantic Ocean that are relatively bounded, have their own integrity and can be studied in their own right, without reference to a wider Atlantic world.<sup>80</sup> For Armitage, this ‘is not the Atlantic as a congeries of cis-Atlantic histories because there is no assumption that these places should be connected to a larger circuit of communication’.<sup>81</sup> Instead, it commits to the idea of plural seas and parallel spaces, of disintegration instead of aggregation. It is a push against the pitfalls of overgeneralisation that can accompany circum-Atlantic history, advocating for more diversity and complexity. Because these histories refuse to adhere to mega-trends and meta-

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 102-105.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

narratives of the entire Atlantic basin, infra-Atlantic histories are not necessarily histories *of* the Atlantic, but histories *in* the Atlantic.<sup>82</sup>

While this thesis is not fundamentally an infra-Atlantic history because it does assume Turks Islands were connected to wider Atlantic processes, nonetheless there are parallels. This thesis narrates a story that predominantly sits within a sub-sea of the Atlantic Ocean, the Sargasso Sea. It is a story of salt production and trade between Turks Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and the mainland colonies chiefly within this maritime space. While at times there are wider references to London, London's role in Turks Islands' development is proven to be largely reactive. Moreover, the enslaved labourers who were brought to Turks Islands came from Bermuda, where foreign importation of enslaved people was banned by 1676. As a result, the enslaved labourers at Turks Islands were mostly Bermudian, and later Turks Island, creoles. They did not originate from Africa. And although Turks Island salt did return to the Caribbean in the form of salted foods, this thesis does not focus on its consumption. Therefore, while this thesis does not claim to be one of 'Atlantic History's Hundred Horizons' as it is not primarily a story about disaggregation and isolation, undoubtedly it is set within a sub-sea of the Atlantic and, to the extent that it does attend to what was particular and local to Turks Islands, it is also in favour of diversifying our understanding of Caribbean processes.<sup>83</sup>

These six approaches, when taken in aggregate, offer a healthy blue-print for historians to write Atlantic histories that are sensitive to local and regional diversity, attentive to broader Atlantic forces and cognisant of world processes flowing through this space. As Hatfield has said of Virginia, but with equal relevance to other societies within the Atlantic,

Each of these constructions – Atlantic world, Virginia, local region, international colonial America, North America and English Atlantic – functioned in slightly different ways and each was relevant under different circumstances. They coexisted and intersected. All are necessary for understanding the reality of life in seventeenth-century Virginia that

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

was connected to different parts of its wider world in very different ways.<sup>84</sup>

Playing with different scales and being mindful of what is local in the global and vice-versa produces a more authentic understanding of Atlantic littoral societies. All perspectives are necessary; each sheds light on a particular historical question or theme. The methodological flexibility this thesis utilises – from trans-Atlantic, to cis-Atlantic, to sub-Atlantic, to infra-Atlantic – is needed because the fragile balance between fragmentation and unity that characterises Caribbean historiography is also a feature of Atlantic history. It is a dialectic relationship that is informative: only through an investigation of the Atlantic's propensity towards fragmentation *and* cohesion can historians arrive at a more informed understanding of the region's history.

### **Commodity history**

Since the rise of globalisation in the 1980s, scholars have increasingly been interested in tracing the antecedent roots of this contemporary process. Many historians have used commodities to grasp these earlier connections as they allow historians to break free from nationalist paradigms and pursue the routes commodities took between colonies, across imperial borders and over maritime regions. In Atlantic and Caribbean history, commodities have proven a similarly useful analytical tool. As Burnard has reflected, 'a particularly long-lasting consequence of Atlantic connections in the early-modern period has been a greatly accelerated movement of individual commodities throughout the Atlantic world'.<sup>85</sup> While there are studies that approach a group of commodities, it is more common to focus on specific commodities.

One of the most influential commodity histories has been Fernando Ortiz' pioneering *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1995), which argued that the development of sugar and tobacco production intrinsically shaped Cuban society as it contributed towards the creation of a national culture through a

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<sup>84</sup> Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia*, p. 227.

<sup>85</sup> Trevor Burnard, 'Global Commodities', *The Idea of Atlantic History*, 29 May 2015. <<https://0-www-oxfordbibliographies-com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0007.xml>> (10 June 2019).



process of European and African transculturation.<sup>86</sup> In Ortiz' wake, many historians have addressed the impacts commodities have had on different aspects of Atlantic and Caribbean society.<sup>87</sup> In fact, using commodities as an analytical tool is so useful precisely because they allow historians to mine different historical themes, allowing multiple stories to be told without their narratives becoming untenably disarticulated. At the heart of this thesis lies the commodity of salt and it is used as a binding agent that allows different historical themes to be explored at different analytical scales.

Since the 1990s, there has also been a growth within commodity histories of commodity chain studies that follow a commodity through its entire lifecycle: from its production and circulation to its final consumption. According to Arjun Appadurai, 'it is "things-in-motion" that illuminate a commodity's human and social context'.<sup>88</sup> By following a commodity through time and space, historians can grasp the different relations, values and meanings it engendered, while avoiding any rigid organisational or national framework. Histories that do this tend to be global or Atlantic in scope. Giorgio Riello's *Cotton* (2013) is a fine example of how a global history of the commodity chain of cotton can be written that incorporates India, China, Japan, West Africa and Europe.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, Anderson's *Mahogany* effectively utilises an Atlantic perspective as it traces this wood from its Belizean roots to its crafting into furniture and ultimate sale in early America, in order to uncover a story of human and environmental exploitation. One of the path-breaking commodity-chain histories for the Caribbean has been Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1986).<sup>90</sup> This book synchronically brings together the sugar-producing societies of the Caribbean

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<sup>86</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (revised edn, translated from the Spanish by Harriet de Onis, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> For examples of these commodity histories see William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Stuart B Schwartz (ed.), *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

<sup>88</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>90</sup> Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

with the sugar-consuming working classes of Britain in order to demonstrate how sugar shaped the modern world and provided the calorie-intake needed to fuel the urban populations of the Industrial Revolution.

While there are many benefits to writing the history of a commodity's entire chain, there is always a possibility that the chain is not linear and will branch in multiple directions or conjoin with other commodities to become new products. While this can be fruitful for the global or circum-Atlantic historian, it is a challenging task for those interested in telling a story of one particular place or region. As this thesis tracks the settlement and development of Turks Islands, together with its regional inter-island connections, it is unapologetically a Caribbean-centred analysis whose objective is not to track salt's entire commodity chain but to understand how salt impacted that colony's development. As such, it focuses on the first half of this chain, looking at the production of salt and its trade *before* it was combined with other commodities and fashioned into food items like salted pork, beef and cod for colonial consumption. Moreover, in telling mega-histories of a commodity's entire lifecycle an in-depth analysis of primary sources is not always possible. For these reasons, many historians prefer to write in detail about one or two aspects of a commodity's lifecycle. As this thesis explores the production and initial trade of Turks Island salt, the historiography of these two stages will be discussed in more depth.

### *Production*

Given the interest in globalisation by economists and social scientists in the 1980s, it is understandable that within commodity histories attending to production and trade there is a focus on economic and social analyses – things that have ample statistics and have been used to assess the state of the world economy.<sup>91</sup> In *Sweetness and Power*, Mintz devoted a chapter to sugar's

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<sup>91</sup> For examples of commodity histories engaging in socioeconomic analysis, see Laird W Bergrad, 'Toward Puerto Rico's Grito de Lares: Coffee, Social Stratification and Class Conflicts', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 60 No. 4 (Nov., 1980), pp. 617-642; Redcliff Salaman, *History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949); and J K Evans, 'Wheat Production and Its Social

production and offered a fairly traditional economic and social analysis of the structure and profits of the sugar plantation system. Here the experience of enslaved workers was not specifically highlighted. Recently, however, there have been more efforts to recover the experiences of those who laboured in the production of commodities. For example, Anderson's *Mahogany* does attempt to capture what it was like to work in a logging camp within the British Honduran jungle while John Tully retrieves the experience of indigenous free peoples who worked to extract gum from the gutta-percha trees of Malaysia, which would later be used to insulate British telegraph cables.<sup>92</sup> In a similar effort, this thesis pays attention to how salt was fashioned into a commodity at Turks Islands and what it was like to work with this product, while attending to the political economy and colonial society that arose around it. As such, it balances aspects of a traditional socioeconomic analysis with contemporary efforts to recover the experiences of labourers in order to provide a more human history alongside the statistics that can inadvertently desensitise readers. In this it takes inspiration from Bruno Latour's actor network theory set out in *Reassembling the Social* (2005), which argues inanimate non-human actors can and do contribute towards the construction of human systems and social networks.<sup>93</sup> It takes the environment seriously when studying the quality of human experience.

However, while some commodity histories cross-pollinate with environmental history to consider the ways nature was an *agent* in human socioeconomic development, another body of work considers how nature was also a *victim* of humanity. These tend to chart the negative environmental consequences that have resulted from the commodification of nature, tying into contemporary notions of planetary stewardship and its concern for environmental change. For example, Watts's *The West Indies* describes the Caribbean as an archipelago of environmentally sensitive islands whose ecology was irretrievably transformed and damaged after the introduction and spread of sugar monoculture; while Mark Kurlansky's *Cod* (1999) argues that the onset of

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Consequences in the Roman World', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 31 No. 2 (Dec., 1981), pp. 428-442.

<sup>92</sup> John Tully, 'A Victorian Ecological Disaster: Imperialism, the Telegraph, and Gutta-Percha', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 20 No. 4 (Dec., 2009), pp. 559-579.

<sup>93</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

modern technological innovations, poor regulation, falling cod prices and growing European demand combined to devastate the reproductive capacities of Atlantic cod by the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> In these narratives the commodification of nature has also led to environmental devastation.

### *Trade*

While studying a commodity's production can provide rewarding analyses of its political economy, its labourers, and the colonial society in which it was produced, the trade of a commodity sheds light on the merchant networks its circulations created. Trade was of paramount importance to the Atlantic world. As Adam Finucane reflects, "commerce" as an organising concept would have been as logical as "empire" to those who lived and worked in the middle of a hugely active Caribbean marketplace'.<sup>95</sup> When it came to knitting these regions together, regional trade was arguably more significant to colonial inhabitants than imperial directives or metropolitan interventions from London or Paris.

Knowing this, a study of inter- and intra-colonial trades allows historians to move beyond the insular (and often arbitrary) boundaries of colonies to follow the movement of goods, people and ideas between littoral societies. Not only does this create rich inter-island histories, but it also questions the supposed sealed nature of empires. For example, Bertie Mandleblatt's study on provisioning the French Caribbean follows the geographical trajectory of Irish salt beef from the Irish coast, to the French port cities of Nantes, La Rochelle and Bordeaux, to its final arrival in the French Caribbean.<sup>96</sup> To great effect, Mandelblatt uses Irish salt beef to demonstrate that the nutritional demands of enslaved persons drove a commodity chain that effectively negated French mercantilist policies as it navigated a course across imperial borders.

One new and exciting area of research is the study of merchant networks that were often built around kith and kinship connections. In *Oceans of Wine* (2009), David Hancock uses network theory in his analysis of the rise of the

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<sup>94</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (London: Vintage, 1999).

<sup>95</sup> Finucane, 'Trade and organisation', p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 63 (Spring, 2007), pp. 18-47.

Madeira wine complex to challenge traditional interpretations that see states and empires as the principal actors driving colonial trade in the early-modern Atlantic.<sup>97</sup> Instead, he demonstrates how trade was predominantly de-centralised and self-organised in nature, driven by individuals with rich interpersonal connections who engaged with market forces and often crossed imperial borders. In this way, the Portuguese wine of Madeira found markets within American settler society. In the process, Hancock skilfully de-centres Europe while highlighting the active role of merchants in integrating different parts of the Atlantic together.

With a similar attention to Atlantic merchant networks, Jarvis unpicks the social structure and organisation of Bermuda's merchant fleet.<sup>98</sup> These small but fast sloops were often co-owned by multiple kith and kin relations and relied upon interpersonal connections and agents in the ports they frequented. As such, these small vessels were more like family farms than the large, rigidly disciplined deep-sea vessels or 'floating factories' Rediker describes in *The Slave Ship* (2007).<sup>99</sup> Moreover, by focusing on Bermuda's merchants and their extensive maritime commerce in ships, salt and provisions, Jarvis sympathetically reveals Bermuda as a centre of trade – something that would not have been possible with a focus on its agricultural settlement.<sup>100</sup> As such, concentrating on merchant networks can be an effective method to re-centre small islands that are otherwise overlooked within Caribbean and Atlantic historiography.

By focusing on the movement of salt, provisions and people between Bermuda and Turks Islands, this thesis similarly hopes to situate Turks Islands and Bermuda more centrally within Caribbean historiography and reveal the rich socioeconomic and interpersonal connections that existed between the two. It demonstrates it was these decentralised and self-organised merchant networks that incorporated Turks Islands into the British Empire. Consequently, it chimes with Hancock's work on network theory and suggests the real agents of empire may well have been on the so-called margins. Common to all these histories that

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<sup>97</sup> David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the emergence of American trade and taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves'.

<sup>99</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: a human history* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*.

focus on trade is their attention to sinew populations whose movements and labour stitched this terraqueous region together in significant ways.

## **Conclusion**

Within historiography, this thesis is situated at the intersection of Caribbean history, Atlantic history and commodity history. It offers a Caribbean-centred Atlantic analysis that seeks to move beyond the plantation to further research into alternative spaces of slavery and sinew populations that incorporated Turks Islands into the British Empire from the late seventeenth century. In its exploration of the inter-island relations that developed between Turks Islands, Bermuda and the Bahamas, it is a regional history of some of the most marginalised islands within the Caribbean. Its lies within the British Caribbean, but it does not assume its imperial borders were hermetically sealed.

As this thesis encompasses the Sargasso Sea, and at times the wider Atlantic, it is indebted to oceanic and Atlantic histories. It consistently plays with different scales across the chapters, buoyed by the conviction that all of these perspectives are necessary to uncover the nuances of colonial society at Turks Islands. Therefore, while it is pre-dominantly a cis-Atlantic history, it incorporates aspects of trans-Atlantic history throughout – using salt as a counterpoint to sugar – and it dips into infra-Atlantic history to explore what was particular and unique to Turks Islands. Moreover, in line with sub-Atlantic history, here the sea is taken seriously. In this way, its methodology is flexible, weaving between different scales as and when appropriate.

To tie this flexible methodology together, this thesis uses the commodity of salt as a binding agent. Without salt, it is unlikely the tiny, flat and infertile Turks Islands would ever have been incorporated into the British Empire. Instead, they would have remained uninhabited Out Islands, as many of their neighbours were and still are to this day. Consequently, salt anchors this study and allows different historical themes to be explored together that may have

remained in isolation. In the process, this thesis extends the limited historiography that exists on salt, both in the Caribbean and globally.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> For articles on salt in Turks Islands, see Cynthia Kennedy, 'The Other White Gold: Salt, Slaves, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Colonialism', *The Historian*, Vol. 69. No. 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 215-230; Michele Speitz, 'Blood Sugar and Salt Licks: Corroding Bodies and Preserving Nations in The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself', *Circulations: Romanticism and the Black Atlantic*, October 2011. <<https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.speitz.html>> (10 June 2019); and Margot Maddison-MacFadyen, 'Turks Islands' Salt, Enslavement and the Newfoundland-West Indian Trade', *Newfoundland Quarterly*, Vol. 105 No. 1 (2012), pp. 40-44. For articles on different aspects of salt's global history, see Sidney Mintz, 'Sweet, Salt and the Language of Love', *MLN*, Vol. 106 No. 4 (Sep., 1991), pp. 852-860; Harlan W Gilmore, 'Cultural Diffusion Via Salt', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 57 No. 5 (Oct., 1955), pp. 1011-1015; Kathryn Barrett-Gaines, 'The Katwe Salt Industry: A Niche in the Great Lakes Regional Economy', *African Economic History*, No. 32 (2004), pp. 15-49; John Jackle, 'Salt on the Ohio Valley Frontier: 1770-1820', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 59 No. 4 (Dec., 1969), pp. 687-709; Isaac Lippincott, 'The Early Salt Trade of the Ohio Valley', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 20 No. 2 (Dec., 1912), pp. 1029-1052; and C Venkataswamy, 'Salt-pan keratitis', *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology*, Vol. 16 No. 4 (1968), pp. 249-250. For monographs on salt's history and significance, see Paul Lovejoy, *Salt of the Desert Sun: A History of Salt Production and Trade in the Central Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Meredith Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration and Survival* (Columbia: University of Michigan Press, 2006); and Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2013).

## Chapter 3: Migratory, Maritime and Transient: Settling the Salt Islands of the British Caribbean, 1660s-1830s

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the settlement phase of Turks Islands and the roles that Bermuda and the Bahamas played in its economic and political incorporation within the British Empire. It will argue that Turks Islands' settlement followed a fairly unique pattern within the British Caribbean: from temporary to permanent settlement, from maritime visitations to terrestrial habitation, and from *de facto* Bermudian rule to *de jure* Bahamian sovereignty, over the course of a century. In reaching this assessment it will pay attention to contemporary geographical sources that both reflected these changing settlement patterns and formed a part of the resources Bermudians and Bahamians deployed as they made claims to these spaces.

To explore these trends, the chapter is divided into two parts. First, it will use cartographic sources to illustrate briefly the changing settlement patterns on Turks Islands during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and highlight how these patterns varied significantly from the sugar islands of the Caribbean. Whereas settlement of the sugar islands rapidly involved terrestrial, fixed, and permanent settlement patterns, the salt islands were initially sub-islands or sub-colonies of Bermuda and experienced a fundamentally different maritime, migratory and transient form of early settlement. This began with their discovery in the 1660s and was still existent by the mid-eighteenth century. But over time it produced significant inter-colonial tensions in the region. Successive Bahamian Governors sought to formally incorporate Turks Islands into their jurisdiction and encourage permanent settlement in order to tax the salt industry more effectively. By the end of the eighteenth century, the gatherers' migratory lifestyle was under threat. Cartographic sources can help historians track this change.

The second part of this chapter will provide an in-depth exploration of the inter-colonial wrangling that took place. It will use contemporary geographical sources to illustrate the competing claims of the Bermudian and Bahamian



legislatures. Importantly, as Jordan Branch has argued, the Atlantic world was undergoing a cartographic revolution at this time, which saw an emergent and very specific geographical understanding of space gathering powerful momentum.<sup>1</sup> As techniques of mapping were transformed, certain territorial claims were increasingly delegitimised as others were naturalised. At Turks Islands, Bahamian and Bermudian colonial inhabitants tapped into these trends and used complimentary and contrasting geographical logics in an attempt to demonstrate and secure their sovereignty over these saline spaces. In the end, Bermudian manipulation of geographical arguments could not win against the emerging early-modern conception of space that, with or without intention, served to authenticate Bahamian authority over Turks Islands.

### **The settlement of Turks Islands**

Bermudian merchants and seafarers were the first to colonise Turks Islands in the 1660s and it was their seasonal maritime activities that created the particular dynamics that became characteristic of their settlement. To uncover a story of Turks Islands' development, it is therefore important to grasp the local conditions endemic to Bermuda, in the island's demography, economy and governance, that prompted these Atlantic denizens to search abroad for a staple with which to trade and land on Turks Islands' shores.

#### *Bermuda's maritime revolution*

Though initially discovered by the Spanish in 1605, it was the Virginia Company (and later the Somers Island Company) that settled Bermuda from 1609. At first, the environment proved exceptionally wholesome to its inhabitants and they turned the soil to a diverse range of crops, but the island was small and quickly grew overcrowded. By 1625, 'almost all of the island's twenty square miles were under cultivation'.<sup>2</sup> In line with efforts in Virginia, tobacco was considered the

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 59 No. 3 (Jul., 2002), p. 588.

prized export commodity. However, due to a lack of curing knowledge, skilled Africans and Amerindians were introduced. Though Bermuda's first black and Amerindian inhabitants occupied an ambiguous legal status, a system of slavery had developed on the islands by the 1660s.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the sugar plantations, the rate of natural increase amongst Bermuda's enslaved population was positive. By the 1670s, Bermuda's enslaved population had outrun demands for its employ. In 1676, Governor John Heydon capped the importation of any new enslaved persons.<sup>4</sup> From then on, Bermuda's enslaved population consisted of predominantly Afro-creoles, and the island's overall population 'increased from 1,600 in 1625 to 8,000 in 1679'.<sup>5</sup> Bermuda had become one of the most densely populated colonies of the English Atlantic and was widely regarded as congested. Pressure to migrate elsewhere was building throughout this period.

Moreover, Bermuda's economic problems were beginning to show as tobacco rapidly exhausted its limited soil just when Virginia's success created an irreversible fall in global tobacco prices. For Bermudians, it was clear they had to diversify into maritime trades. This they began to effect during the English Civil War but the Restoration marked a dramatic re-establishment of the Somers Island Company's control. Shipbuilding was banned, tobacco production was reinstated, and the company forced Bermudians to restore fields to tobacco cultivation. These dogmatic controls harmed the local settlers and spurred them to take political action. A group of settlers and merchants took the company to court in London. In June 1684, after a four-year *quo warranto* trial, the court ruled in their favour. The Somers Island Company's charter was revoked and, as part of Charles II's designs to reign in the colonies, Bermuda was returned to Crown rule.<sup>6</sup> As the company's trading restrictions were lifted, entrepreneurial Bermudians began to fan out across the Atlantic littoral. Michael Jarvis has argued this was *the* pivotal moment in the island's economic development.<sup>7</sup> It marked the beginning of what he termed Bermuda's 'maritime revolution', when

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Bernhard, 'Beyond the Chesapeake: The Contrasting Status of Blacks in Bermuda, 1616-1663', *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 54 No. 4 (Nov., 1988), pp. 545-564.

<sup>4</sup> Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves', p. 590.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 591.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

settlers turned away from agricultural pursuits towards maritime trades.<sup>8</sup> Bermuda's overcrowding and exhausted soils meant, in a sense, it *had* to carve out a niche within the Atlantic maritime economy.

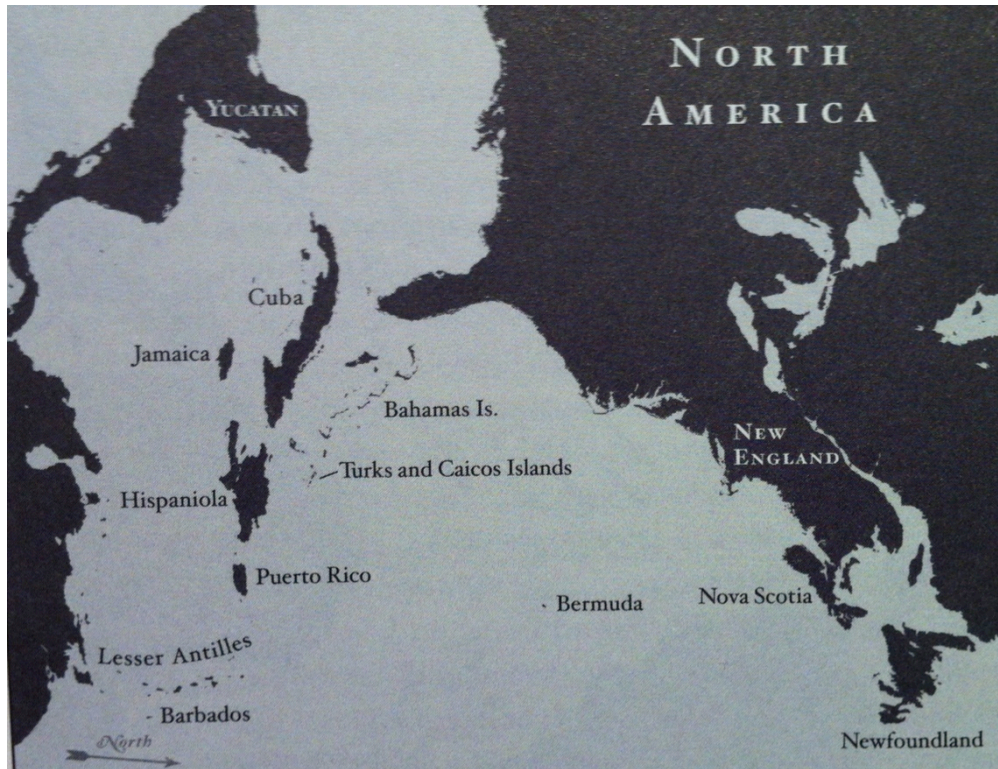


Figure 3.1: The Atlantic Arc of British America, c. 1750. Drawn by Elizabeth Eaton. From Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 3.

Bermuda was in a good location to do this, lying at the heart of the Atlantic trading system. Consider Figure 3.1, a flipped traditional textbook map of the British Atlantic. From emphasising the North American landmass, it has centralised Bermuda, which, according to a contemporary, was ‘in the eye of all trade’ during the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> It brings the Caribbean Sea into focus, reflecting the fact Bermuda was increasingly engaged in dense socioeconomic networks across this space rather than towards Africa or Europe. Understood from Bermuda’s position, the Caribbean islands and coastlines of America were surveyed as a continuous arc, dotted with economic possibilities.

<sup>8</sup> Jarvis, ‘Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves’, p. 592.

<sup>9</sup> Jarvis, *In The Eye of All Trade*, p. 4.

The pressures on land meant seafaring and shipbuilding offered Bermudians an elegant solution. Maritime trades allowed merchants to engage their enslaved more profitably while free male Bermudians were also granted better employment opportunities.<sup>10</sup> The fact Bermudians used enslaved persons as crewmembers also significantly reduced their shipping costs. This coupled with their fast and resilient cedar sloops meant Bermudian merchants could undercut their competitors as carriers of goods. As maritime trades opened up, the ensuing seafaring success was reflected in a dramatically expanded merchant fleet. By 1707, a contemporary reported Bermudians earned their ‘subsistence chiefly by Navigation’.<sup>11</sup> It was a maritime revolution triggered by the dissolution of the Somers Island Company but clearly driven through the socioeconomic pressures brewing on this small, densely populated island. As Bermudian seafarers went in search of economic opportunity, a number discovered salt at Turks Islands. Here was a free staple with which to trade.

#### *Early settlement of Turks Islands*

Turks Islands’ settlement was the product of enterprising Bermudian seafarers who started making use of its plentiful supply of the eighteenth century’s other ‘white gold’.<sup>12</sup> While Bermudians had been intermittently raking salt since the 1660s, a growing number of inhabitants became economically reliant on the salt harvests as Bermuda’s economy turned maritime.<sup>13</sup> According to Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, about 500 Bermudians were engaged in the salt season in 1701.<sup>14</sup> Wartime shortages made salt cargoes particularly valuable. In 1700, salt that was sold in Philadelphia could obtain two shillings and two pence per bushel but during Queen Anne’s War that rose to between three and four

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<sup>10</sup> Jarvis, ‘Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves’, pp. 593-594.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Elaine Forman Crane, ‘The Socioeconomics of a Female Majority in Eighteenth-Century Bermuda’, *Signs*, Vol. 15 No. 2 (Winter, 2002), p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Kennedy, ‘The Other White Gold: Salt, Slaves, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Colonialism’, *The Historian*, Vol. 69 No. 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 215-230.

<sup>13</sup> While sources vary on when exactly Bermudians first began raking salt at Turks Islands, there seems to be general agreement it was during the 1660s. See Turks and Caicos Museum, ‘Turks and Caicos History Timeline’, Culture and History, 2018. <<http://www.tcmuseum.org/culture-history/turks-caicos-timeline/>> (19 July 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, *Chained on the Rock: Slavery in Bermuda* (ed. by C F E Hollis Hallett, 2nd edn, Bermuda: National Museum of Bermuda Press, 2012), p. 63.

shillings.<sup>15</sup> One English captain even boasted he sold salt in Maryland for ‘above 8 times what it cost’ him in Bermuda in 1705 – a rate many Bermudian merchants also capitalised on.<sup>16</sup> In 1708, eighteen vessels ‘departed Bermuda for the Turks Islands, Salt Tortuga, or the Bahamas, accounting for one eighth of the island’s clearances’.<sup>17</sup> However, in 1716, this figure had risen to sixty-five vessels, a full third of all departures.<sup>18</sup> At this point, a Bermudian sloop and its crew could fill their hold with salt in ‘as little as two weeks during the peak salt season’.<sup>19</sup> So handy was the salt trade as an additional source of income that ‘over the course of their lives, virtually every Bermudian seafarer engaged in raking to some extent and many spent years working Turks Islands pans’.<sup>20</sup> However, because these islands were vulnerable to Spanish and French privateers, salt raking was predominantly carried out by white sailor-rakers.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to the Board of Trade in 1725, Governor John Hope of Bermuda wrote an account of the distinct pattern of salt raking. It is worth relating his passage in full:

All vessels clear out with a number of mariners sufficient to navigate the vessel anywhere, but they generally take three or four slaves besides...[and] go agathering of salt at Turks Island, etc. When they then arrive, the white men are turn’d ashoar to rake salt...for 10 or 12 months on a stretch [while] the master with his vessel navigated by Negroes during that time goes a Marooning – fishing for turtles, diving upon wrecks and sometimes trading with pyrates. If the vessel happens to be lucky upon any of these accounts, Curacao, St Eustatia, St Thomas or the French Islands are the ports where they always are well received without any questions asked, and if a good price is offered, the vessel generally goes with the cargo. If not, they return and take in their white sailors with

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<sup>15</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p. 196.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> For example, in 1709 the Spanish attacked and seized Turks Islands. A year later, Bermudians fitted out an armed expedition under Lewis Middleton to recapture them and resume their salt-gathering activities. See Ibid, pp. 202-203. In 1729, the Spanish again attacked Turks Islands and seized several enslaved salt rakers, who were valued at £400 sterling. See Packwood, *Chained on the Rock*, p. 52.

salt from the Turks Islands and under the cover of their old clearings, from hence they proceed to some of the Northern Plantations to sell their cargo of salt.<sup>22</sup>

From this passage, several notable characteristics of Bermuda's maritime rhythms are revealed. Those who engaged in salt raking would not have considered themselves solely as 'salt rakers' or 'salt merchants'. In the initial phase of Turks Islands' development, these migrating Bermudians engaged in multiple trades. To spread risk, and maximise profit, early-modern Bermudian seafarers were engaged in a niche economy that was characteristically dynamic.

In her study of the salt industry of Katwe in nineteenth-century Uganda, Kathryn Barrett-Gaines urges historians to adopt this 'concept of the niche economy'.<sup>23</sup> It applies to Bermudian mariners as well:

The concept of the niche economy can help us to see African economic behaviour not only as adaptation to adversity, or as embattled people 'making do' with short-term remedies. Looking at African economies as niche economies can help us to understand them in terms other than the 'crisis terminology' of things falling apart into an 'anarchy' that has never been very far from Western images of African social life.<sup>24</sup>

As Barrett-Gaines makes clear, it is a reflection of modern western lifestyles that people are encouraged and assumed to have one form of employment. Yet in colonial Uganda, Africans had multiple occupations ('People Are Not One Thing'<sup>25</sup>) that did not reflect a situation of crisis, but of adaptability to local socioeconomic and political circumstances. Although colonial Uganda may seem far from its Caribbean contemporaries, this idea of a 'niche economy' – of pursuing multiple occupations at once – was clearly what Governor Hope described for early-eighteenth-century Bermuda. Moreover, his account addresses the fact that during this period Bermudians did not reside permanently on Turks Islands: they returned annually to their families in Bermuda.

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<sup>22</sup> The National Archives, Governor John Hope to the Board of Trade, 30 September 1725, CO 37/11 ff. 231-232.

<sup>23</sup> Kathryn Barrett-Gaines, 'The Katwe Salt Industry: A Niche in the Great Lakes Regional Economy', *African Economic History*, No. 32 (2004), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Life on the saltpans was seasonal and salt was produced from March to November when the weather was hottest and driest. Inclement weather and winter rains marked the end of the season that year. While initially salt gatherers would have arrived at Turks Islands on a first-come, first-served basis, following Britain's formal extension of sovereignty over, and guaranteed protection of, Turks Islands in 1764 (see Chapter 7), more Bermudians became involved in the industry and it became necessary to regulate it more effectively. A system of Head Rights was introduced in 1767. Chapter 5 will explore that system in depth, but it is relevant to state here that this system involved apportioning salt pond shares at the start of each season in an equitable manner for its duration. Once this had taken place, salt gatherers dug out, demarcated and cleaned their saltpans of impurities within the drained lagoons, before a series of sluices and gates were opened to allow the seawater back in. As evaporation occurred, concentrated brine was encouraged into shallower pans to augment its surface area and facilitate further evaporation. While the sun and wind did much of the work, this was still exceedingly laborious. It involved standing in concentrated brine for many hours of the day raking salt and encouraging crystals to form. Once the salt was ready to be harvested, it was piled up on land, covered with palmetto leaves, and left to dry, before it was carried by hand in bushel bags onto lighters and transported to merchant ships offshore. The heat would have been unrelenting and there was real risk of pirates and privateers. With no fresh water and only limited provisions available, it is little wonder Bermudians preferred to annually migrate to these shores rather than permanently settle.

These migrations had significant consequences for Turks Islands' development. The decision to annually migrate was reflected in the lack of permanent structures within the islands. Consider Figure 3.2, an inset from a survey of 1753 that was produced during the initial phase of Turks Islands' settlement. This survey was undertaken at a time when these islands were not Crown territory. As such it should be considered to reflect their development as part of *de facto* Bermudian territory. Within this survey, the surveyor has sought to include not only topographical elements but also some of the manmade structures erected on their terrain. Of particular interest is the inclusion of the salt gatherers' lodgings. These are labelled 'salt rakers huts'. Cartographers in general wrote few words on their products. They relied more heavily on visual

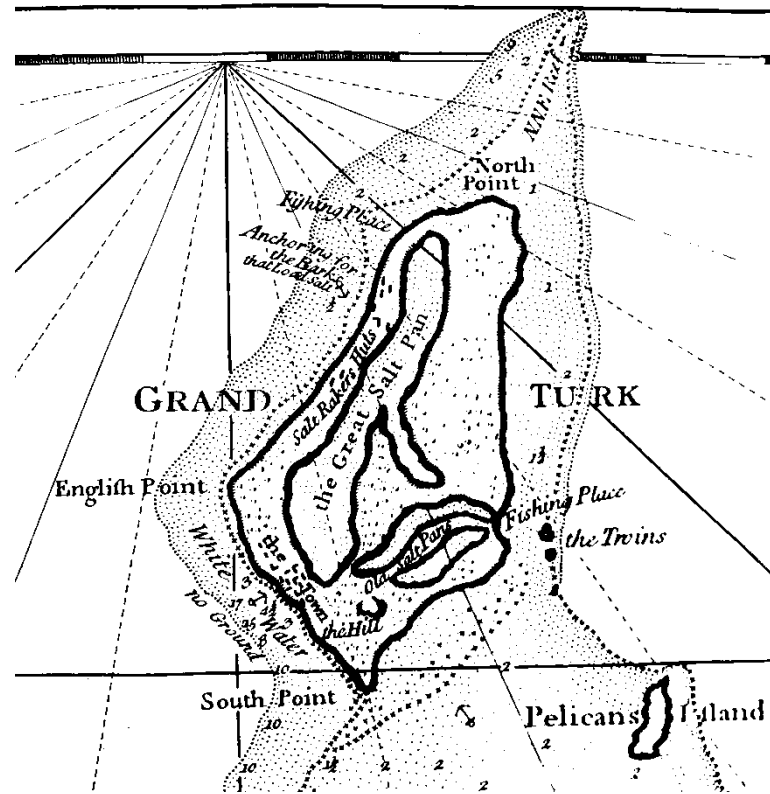


Figure 3.2: Detail of Grand Turk from a survey of Turks Islands, 1753. From The British Library, 'Turks Islands from a survey made in 1753 by the Sloops l'Aigle and l'Emeraude with improvements from observations made in 1770 in the Sr. Edward Hawke, Kings Schooner' (London, 1794).

codes, shading and lines. The rationing of words in cartography meant those chosen were chosen with care. Though more permanent than tents, 'huts' imply a basic and temporary structure. They were a long way from the double-storey stone houses that would epitomise Turks Island merchant dwellings in the early nineteenth century. An impression of these, more substantial, houses can be gained from Figure 3.3, a photograph of 'The White House' built in circa 1835 by the Harriott family.

While one could argue the erection of 'huts' may have been the result of inadequate investments and limited access to materials, such dwellings may have been financially judicious. Turks Islands were frequently vulnerable to Spanish and French attacks.<sup>26</sup> For example, in 1764, the French invaded Turks Islands

<sup>26</sup> Jarvis, 'Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves', p. 597.



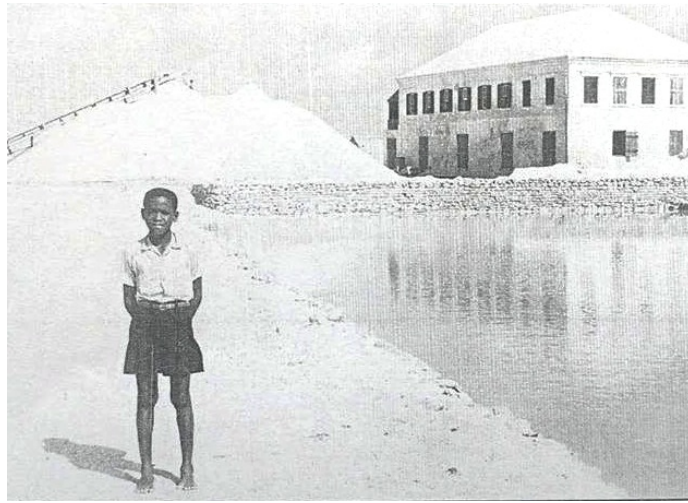


Figure 3.3: Photograph of The White House, Salt Key, 1964. From Nigel Sadler, *Turks and Caicos Islands in old photographs* (Grand Turk: Turks and Caicos National Museum, 2003), p. 12.

and ‘destroyed the huts, tools and supplies of the salt rakers, and took them prisoner’.<sup>27</sup> By installing temporary structures that could *also* be easily reconstructed, Bermudians were arguably being practical. Given their desire to annually migrate, these ‘huts’ reduced their financial losses in the event of an attack during their absence. If they had preferred to live there permanently, it would have been more prudent to erect enduring structures and lines of defence to ward off foreign incursions.

However, Bermudians did not wish to permanently settle. Turks Islands were an unforgiving landscape in which to reside and to work. For example, in 1790, the Committee of the Body of Salt Gatherers penned a letter to a local official explaining why they preferred to be transient. The Bermudians’ vehement rejection of residency was clear. They deplored ‘the opinion which has of late gone forth in the Bahamas that settlers should come and fix at Turks Islands on a stable and permanent footing; an idea of this sort should really seem to be quite repugnant’.<sup>28</sup> Utilising an environmental counterargument, the

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy, ‘The Other White Gold’, p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Committee of the Body of Salt Gatherers to the Honourable Alexander Murray’, 16 March 1790, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim*

gatherers pointed out that ‘owing to some quality in the air and climate, which is of a most noxious and deleterious tendency, there is not more than one constitution in twenty that can bear a longer stay on the place, than two or three years at farthest’.<sup>29</sup> Coming from Bermuda, a place known for its temperate conditions, healthy air and verdant nature, a preference to Bermuda over these flat, barren islands was understandable.

How unique was this maritime and migratory settlement pattern within the British Caribbean? In the wake of the sugar revolution, which began in Barbados in the 1640s, the demands of sugar production heavily influenced how the sugar islands would develop. According to Barry Higman, ‘the sugar revolution brought with it a series of interrelated transformations that had fundamental implications for all aspects of the economy, society and government of the islands’.<sup>30</sup> In short, it created the plantation, ‘a land unit that resembled a small region or domain, with the equivalent of a village at its centre and a population and architectural mass to match’.<sup>31</sup> When harvesting cane, it was essential the juice be extracted within days. This necessitated that the industrial mechanism for extracting cane juice was located near the source of its cultivation. There needed to be a ‘mill to extract juice by crushing the canes between cylindrical rollers’ and a series of large copper pans for the juice to boil and crystallise in before it was packed into barrels and left to drain and dry.<sup>32</sup> This combination of factory and field required significant investment, labour, time and energy to build and maintain. Conversely, it needed protection, as the risk of loss was far higher on a sugar plantation than on a saltpan. Moreover, provisions could be produced in these fertile soils while staggered sugar harvests meant this cash crop could be planted throughout the year. As a result, many inhabitants chose to, or were forced to, remain on these islands. In this setting, there was less need for an adaptable niche economy. Instead, the sugar islands were characterised with fixed, permanent and terrestrial settlement, a marked contrast to Turks Islands.

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*of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> B W Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

However, there were other spaces of empire that did produce settlement patterns reminiscent of Turks Islands. The colonial history of the Caribbean is peppered with examples of secondary or sub-island settlement patterns. For example, after its settlement in the 1660s, Barbuda was considered an appendage of Antigua in an unusual fashion. As Margaret Tweedy has described, the Crown leased Barbuda to private entrepreneurs in order to encourage settlement and discourage foreign invasion.<sup>33</sup> From 1684 to 1870 it was in the hands of the Codrington family who owned several estates in Antigua and used it to primarily furnish their plantations with livestock. Its enslaved labourers lived on the island permanently and, due to the abundance of provisions and less strenuous labour, experienced a natural growth 'from 172 in 1746 to 503 in 1831'.<sup>34</sup> As such, Barbuda was effectively a sub-island of Antigua, but the Codrington family largely administered it privately and unlike Turks Islands its population was terrestrial, permanent and settled.

British Honduras, encompassing modern-day Belize and the Mosquito Shore on the Bay of Honduras, offers another example of a secondary settlement pattern. An informal relationship developed between the Baymen of Belize, the Mosquito Indians of the Shore, and the Governor and merchants of Jamaica. As Jennifer Anderson describes, the Baymen were a 'small population of Englishmen (former buccaneers) who lived illegally in Spanish territory in makeshift enclaves along the shore'.<sup>35</sup> Their impermanent settlements were often attacked and raised to the ground, at which point they would flee to the Mosquito Shore for protection before returning to Belize once the Spanish threat had passed. Their logwood industry had a unique seasonality. Although the Baymen's 'makeshift enclaves' remained on the shore, during the logwood season 'the Baymen sent gangs of ten to fifty enslaved woodcutters on long expeditions into the rain forest to fell individual trees, clear a road to each tree's location, and then haul out the cut logs'.<sup>36</sup> These woodcutters and overseers 'lived and worked together for months at a time in the far-scattered mahogany

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret T Tweedy, 'A History of Barbuda under the Codringtons 1738-1833' (MA dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1981), pp. 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. vi.

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer L Anderson, 'Nature's Currency: The Atlantic Mahogany Trade and the Commodification of Nature in the Eighteenth Century', *Early American Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring, 2004), p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

works'.<sup>37</sup> By the time of the seasonal rains, the woodcutters would have hauled their logwood to the river's edge where 'the gang floated the logs in large rafts from the interior down to the coast to be loaded on ocean-going vessels'.<sup>38</sup> Like the salt industry, there was seasonality to woodcutting tied to the rains that shaped an annual and temporary migration from the coast to the interior. However, this was a terrestrial, not maritime, migration.

Further down, on the Mosquito Shore, there was also a small town called Black River founded by William Pitt, which became the area's administrative centre. After 1740, Jamaican Governors 'encouraged Pitt to develop his settlement into an entrepôt for contraband trade' on the Spanish Main and sent a Jamaican detachment of infantry for its protection in 1744.<sup>39</sup> After the War of Jenkins's Ear, the Jamaican Governor also appointed a Superintendent to the Mosquito Shore for its protection and to improve relations with the Mosquito Indians. In 1757, the Superintendent described 'the settlers as differing from the more nomadic Belizean logwood cutters in that they were mostly raiders living in scattered areas with their dependents' in houses 'of wooden frames, thatched and the sides of lathe and plaster, white-washed. But there are some that make a good appearance built entirely of wood, two stories high'.<sup>40</sup> Overall, then, British Honduras did exhibit a secondary settlement pattern to Jamaica, like Turks Islands to Bermuda, but within British Honduras there coexisted both nomadic and more permanent, *terrestrial* lifestyles that varied from the maritime and migratory patterns of the salt gatherers.

In truth, those with lifestyles most like the salt gatherers may have worked a watery commons. Turtling was one activity that involved a transitory, migratory and maritime lifestyle. According to Shakira Crawford and Ana Isabel Márquez-Pérez, by the mid-eighteenth century 'English-speaking inhabitants from the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Nicaragua and the Colombian islands of San Andreas and Old Providence took to the sea in search of green and hawksbill

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Griffith Dawson, 'William Pitt's Settlement at Black River on the Mosquito Shore: A Challenge to Central America, 1732-87', *This Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 63 No. 4 (Nov., 1983), p. 677.

<sup>40</sup> Superintendent Robert Hodgson quoted in Ibid, p. 688.

turtles’.<sup>41</sup> This relied on following the turtles’ migratory patterns knowing that the ‘hawksbill mothers return to the places of their birth to deposit their eggs between March and September’.<sup>42</sup> As this season began, turtlers migrated from across the Caribbean to the banks or keys where turtles were expected and ‘built temporary shelters as they waited for impregnated hawksbills to deliver and bury their eggs in the sands’.<sup>43</sup> As such, these were ‘sporadic migrations, which may have amounted to a few hundred persons’, but as Crawford and Márquez-Pérez point out, they have ‘often been ignored by historians as they were difficult to identify or track’.<sup>44</sup> The turtling industry, though hard to quantify, seems to have offered a similar migratory, maritime and transient settlement pattern to the Turks Island salt industry. Indeed, as Governor Hope described, it formed part of Bermuda’s own niche economy in conjunction with salt gathering. However, the turtle commons cannot be understood as a sub-island colony demonstrating a secondary settlement pattern, as it was transnational in scope, far more maritime, and without a fixed island location.

As such, while the early settlement of Turks Islands did share certain features with other spaces of empire, its exact permutation was specific. Nowhere else in the British Caribbean was there a similar sub-island colony that so rigidly underwent a secondary settlement pattern characterised as maritime, migratory and transient.

### *Late settlement of Turks Islands*

However, over time, external pressures from the Bahamas placed growing pressure on this mode of living as a succession of Bahamian Governors tried (and largely failed) to extend Bahamian taxation laws over the islands and compel the gatherers into a permanent residency. As early as 1693, Bahamas Governor Nicholas Trott tried to place a tax on Turks Island salt and seized

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<sup>41</sup> Shakira D Crawford and Ana Isabel Márquez-Pérez, ‘A contact zone: The turtle commons of the Western Caribbean’, *The International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 28 No. 1 (Feb., 2016), p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

several vessels that were caught refusing to pay it.<sup>45</sup> In 1701, Governor Elias Haskett also seized several Bermudian vessels laden with salt. And later, in 1738, the Bahamas Government legislated to impose a salt tax, this time with designs to fund an armed vessel to enforce and collect the fees. The Board of Trade did not support any of these measures and revoked the Bahamian Act, while a period of war caused a temporary hiatus in Bahamian taxation designs. But it was not the end of the matter.

The 1770s saw a decided renewal in Bahamian efforts to bring Turks Islands under its general laws. In 1772, the Bahamas Government passed a series of Acts ‘aimed at disrupting Bermudian salt raking and establishing Bahamian jurisdiction’.<sup>46</sup> If these had been implemented, it would have made year-round residency obligatory to those wishing to harvest salt while introducing a new salt tax of ‘one Farthing per bushel’, a new tonnage duty of two shillings and three pence per ton on all vessels loading with salt, and a new poll tax on free white, free mulatto and enslaved persons.<sup>47</sup> However, the Board of Trade again vetoed these Acts just as the American Revolution ensured such matters were left unresolved. It was a pattern of political manoeuvring that built over time, resurfacing once more in the 1790s. Eventually, in 1803, London intervened and Turks Islands were formally incorporated into Bahamian jurisdiction.

Subsequent maps reveal the extent to which a more permanent settlement was carried out. This is apparent in an Admiralty chart (see Figure 3.4) produced by Commander Richard Owen on board HMS *Blossom* in the 1830s. Owen entered the Royal Navy in 1811 and his career allied strongly with surveying vessels. In 1829, he received a commission on board the *Blossom* to survey the West Indies, which continued until 1837.<sup>48</sup> At the bottom of his survey for Turks Islands in 1830, there is a certification from the Hydrographic Office. This office, established in 1795 by order of King George III, collated and catalogued all existing charts and created a repository for the Admiralty to provide

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<sup>45</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p. 202.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to Lord Hillsborough, 10 October 1771, CO 23/21/3. The National Archives, Andrew Symmer to Lord Hillsborough, 20 November 1771, CO 23/21/9.

<sup>48</sup> William Richard O’Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary: compromising the life and services of every living officer in her Majesty’s navy, from the rank of admiral of the fleet to that of lieutenant, inclusive* (London: J Murray, 1849), pp. 846-847.

‘accurate’ navigational aids to naval and merchant shipping – to better ‘know’ the geography of the British Empire. The fact Owen’s chart specifically equates Turks Islands with the Bahamas underscores how these islands had formally been incorporated into Bahamian territory by 1830. There is nothing on the chart to suggest any sort of affinity with Bermuda or an entwined history.

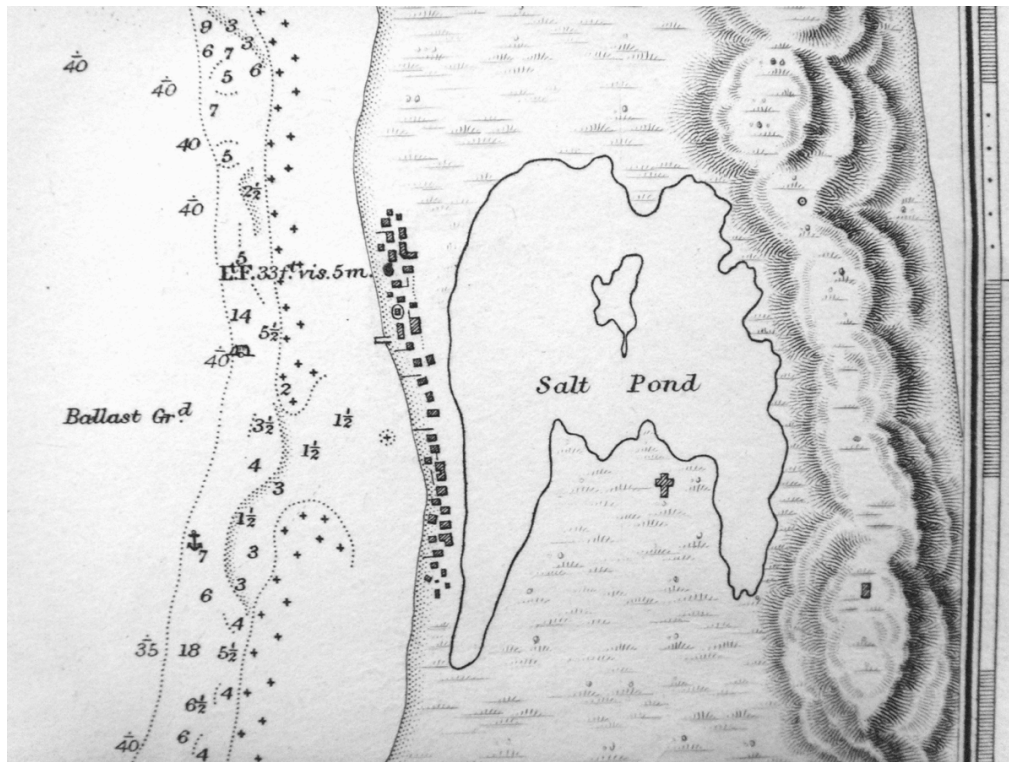


Figure 3.4: Detail of Grand Turk from a survey of Turks Islands, 1830. From The British Library, Richard Owen, ‘Turks Islands surveyed by Captain R Owen in 1830, Admiralty Chart’ (London, 1842).

The chart records the depth of the ocean floor and the main sea routes, but importantly highlights the development that had occurred on Grand Turk. By 1830, there is evidence of wharfs, merchant buildings (as opposed to huts), a church, as well as a Commissioner’s House built to collect the salt duties. Owen has marked a ‘ballast ground’ where Bermudian limestone would have been offloaded after it had weighed down incoming merchant vessels. When recounting her enslaved experience on Turks Islands in the early nineteenth century, Mary Prince reflected that ‘another of our employments was to row a little way off the shore in a boat, and dive for large stones to build a wall round

our master's house'.<sup>49</sup> By approximately 1812, therefore, Prince strongly suggests merchants were making use of limestone ballast to build more permanent structures, wall off their properties and set down roots. The White House, as shown in Figure 3.3, would have been emblematic of this new and permanent island architecture.

From this analysis of cartographic and textual sources, this chapter has sought to illustrate the particular and changing settlement patterns at Turks Islands from the 1660s to the 1830s. It has analysed the demographic, economic and political circumstances of Bermuda prior to the 1660s in order to elucidate why Bermudian merchants and seafarers wanted to incorporate these salt islands into their sphere of influence. As Bermudian merchants and their crews sailed around the 'continuous arc' of the Caribbean, they discovered what became highly profitable islands. In that initial phase of settlement permanent habitation was not initiated or desirable. Instead, there was a pattern of annual migrations and semi-permanent dwellings that owed much to the maritime nature of the Bermudian niche economy and seasonality of salt. However, that migratory and maritime pattern increasingly came under threat from encroaching Bahamian designs. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, a more terrestrial and permanent settlement had taken place as authority passed from *de facto* Bermudian to *de jure* Bahamian rule.

### **The competing claims of the Bahamas and Bermuda**

The second part of this chapter will explore in depth the competing claims that Bermuda and the Bahamas made over Turks Islands, which impacted its settlement during the late eighteenth century. First, it will chart the socioeconomic conditions of the Bahamas to understand why that colony became so interested in Turks Islands at this time. Then, it will situate this period in the broader context of the cartographic revolution, which was changing how early-modern Atlantic inhabitants understood space and authority, before unpacking

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself. With a supplement by the Editor. To which is added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa. A Captured African* (ed. by Thomas Pringle, 3rd edn, London: F Westley and A H Davis, 1831), p. 73.



the inter-colonial wrangling that took place between Bermuda and the Bahamas through an examination of the competing geographical logics each colony deployed. In these struggles there was a proliferation of colonial resources including petitions, surveys and maps. While Chapter 4 will investigate these written petitions and London's final decision to place Turks Islands under Bahamian jurisdiction in detail, this chapter addresses the particular use of geographical sources in the discourses of Bermudians and Bahamians. In the end, it will argue that these were more effective in bolstering Bahamian claims over Turks Islands by inadvertently delegitimising Bermuda's position.

### *A Bahamian financial crisis*

Lying sixty miles off the coast of Florida, the Bahamian archipelago was a series of flat, limestone islands with no fresh water. Although the landing place of Christopher Columbus in 1492, it was not until the 1640s that these islands were settled in a systematic way. Over time, the original inhabitants and their descendants became known as Belongers or 'conchs' after the sea creatures they had a penchant for eating. They eked out a living turtling, whaling, wrecking, and logging, but like Turks Islands, the most significant industry was salt raking.<sup>50</sup> As such, the Bahamas were never developed with sugar plantations nor could they be for want of suitable soils. For this reason, during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they were predominantly marginal to British concerns.

However, in the 1780s, the Bahamas began to play a more prominent role in imperial affairs. Following the American Revolution, and the cession of East Florida to Spain, Loyalist refugees encamped there had to migrate. While there were drawbacks to the Bahamas, notably its 'barren Rocks' and unfavourable soil, the prime concern of these refugee Loyalists was to move somewhere with enough land to employ their enslaved.<sup>51</sup> Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were too cold with a 'climate...not being calculated for Southern Constitutions or the

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<sup>50</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: The Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire* (London: Harper Press, 2011), pp. 218-219.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 220.

employment of the Slaves'.<sup>52</sup> Jamaica and Barbados had few acres left available. The Bahamas, on the other hand, were fairly uncultivated. They seemed the most practical choice. In 1783, the British Government bought out hereditary proprietors in order to offer Loyalist refugees 'Tracts of Land...(gratis) in proportion to their former situation, and ability to situate them'.<sup>53</sup> The Bahamas were now part of British resettlement plans.

The sudden influx of Loyalist refugees had serious consequences for these islands. Their population more than doubled with the rapid arrival of 6,000 persons.<sup>54</sup> Their ethnic make-up was significantly altered as the proportion of black persons to white persons doubled from one to one to two to one.<sup>55</sup> Governor John Maxwell reported: 'They are sitting themselves down, where they can; and without order'.<sup>56</sup> By 1784, he was dealing with a situation that had taken the form of a refugee crisis.

It demanded a calm and organised response, but this was hard to deliver. These were refugees whose travels had often started beyond East Florida. As Maya Jasanoff reflects, 'these doubly displaced refugees came bearing enormous resentment against their own government for abandoning Florida'.<sup>57</sup> Tensions did not ease with resettlement. As the Bahamas were not able to sustain widespread agriculture, food shortages were rife. Governor Maxwell took what he thought the only decision: to open up a provisions trade with the United States and ignore Orders in Council that prohibited it. In doing so, he misjudged the sentiments of the Loyalist refugees. They castigated the Governor for dealing with their 'enemy' and responded by running up to the ships 'to tear the stars and stripes down from the masts'.<sup>58</sup> The cleft between Loyalist refugee and imperial authority widened.

Food was not the only issue. The influx of a large enslaved population sharpened debates around race and slavery. As tracts of land were granted, the

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> The National Archives, Lord North to Governor Tonyn, 4 December 1783, CO 5/560 f. 724.

<sup>54</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, p. 221.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>56</sup> The National Archives, Governor John Maxwell to Lord Sydney, 19 June 1784, CO 23/25/139.

<sup>57</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, p. 227.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 222.

Loyalists desired to recreate the hierarchical and racial society they had previously enjoyed but they came up against ‘an existing white population determined to defend their own interests, and a belligerent governor with a penchant for idiosyncratic antislavery initiatives’.<sup>59</sup> While a series of stringent racial laws were passed within the first years of the immigration crisis, the arrival of a new Governor in 1786 severely threatened their so-called progress. Governor John Dunmore reversed several of the racial codes, believing the liberties of free black persons had been unfairly curtailed and introduced a ‘project of state-sponsored manumission’.<sup>60</sup> The Loyalists viewed Governor Dunmore’s protection of free black liberties, and his softer approach to slavery in general, with disdain.<sup>61</sup> So much so, according to Paul Daniel Shirley, ‘there could be no prospect of reconciliation with Dunmore’s governorship for many Loyalist slaveholders’.<sup>62</sup> Riots around racial issues became frequent and Bahamian society grew increasingly polarised as Loyalists sought a break with imperial authority while Belongers wished to reinforce and extend it.<sup>63</sup>

Governor Dunmore responded to this civil unrest by suspending the courts, outlawing free elections and, most visibly, fortifying the Bahamas to an unprecedented degree. He genuinely worried that ‘had we a war with America tomorrow, the Loyalists... would be those I should have the greatest reason to fear’.<sup>64</sup> A series of battlements were built around the Out Islands but the main fortification was Fort Charlotte, west of Nassau. This impressive structure was as imposing as any fortress in the Caribbean.<sup>65</sup> Costs escalated to a shocking £32,000, eight times the original estimate.<sup>66</sup> It was an enormous financial drain.

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Daniel Shirley, ‘Migration, Freedom and Enslavement in the Revolutionary Atlantic: The Bahamas, 1783-c. 1800’ (PhD thesis, University College London, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>61</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, p. 231.

<sup>62</sup> Shirley, ‘Migration, Freedom and Enslavement’, p. 161.

<sup>63</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, p. 231.

<sup>64</sup> Governor Dunmore quoted in Sandra Riley, *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahamas Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period* (Miami: Island Research, 1983), p. 172.

<sup>65</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, p. 233.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Craton, *A History of the Bahamas* (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 176-177. Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People* (2 vols, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 1, p. 203.

Fiscal stress was compounded when the export economy went into recession in the late 1780s. Loyalists who had settled on the Out Islands had turned their hand to cotton. Though a new crop, initial signs had been positive. Clearing and preparing the land was difficult, but as William Wyllly noted, one planter had managed with ‘no more than thirty-two slaves’ to make nineteen tons of cotton worth ‘nearly double the whole value of the negroes by whose labour it was made’.<sup>67</sup> Overall, in 1787, 250 tons were produced in the Bahamas.<sup>68</sup> However, as quickly as these profits were made, so did the chenille bug latch onto the crops and gorge its way through. This blight damaged harvests in 1788 and caused intermittent crop failures in subsequent years. An unwinnable battle, by 1800 ‘most planters had abandoned their struggles with cotton’.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, in the decade from 1783, the economic, political and demographic situation in the Bahamas was at breaking point. The population had more than doubled, with a significant reversal in its ethnic structure. Divisions between Belongers and Loyalists escalated with time. Riots broke out intermittently, and in response Governor Dunmore became obsessed with expensive fortifications at a bad time for the economy. As he looked around for alternative sources of revenue and more land on which to settle Loyalists, it was no surprise Turks Islands began to feature in his plans.

Moreover, as indicated, Governor Dunmore arrived as the latest of a long line of Governors who had tried and failed to enforce Bahamian jurisdiction over, and permanent settlement within, Turks Islands. Facing a refugee crisis, he immediately granted lots of land at Turks Islands as a means to ease population pressures and encourage permanent settlement. But these grants were in opposition to a King’s command. Later that year the King ordered their revocation and demanded ‘no land, for the future, will be granted upon any island or key where salt is made’.<sup>70</sup> Thwarted, Governor Dunmore then visited Turks Islands to try and raise revenue, soliciting ‘the Residents there either to sell the Ponds in Lots for a Term of years for the purpose; or to adopt some other

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<sup>67</sup> William Wyllly, *A short Account of the Bahamas Islands* (London, 1789), p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, p. 230.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Order in Council of New Providence’, 26 December 1786, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 7.

mode of raising Revenue for the support of the Government of the Bahamas'.<sup>71</sup> In March 1790, the Turks Islands King's Agent (who was also his son) addressed the Bermudian salt gatherers and pressed them to conform to Bahamian tax laws.<sup>72</sup> This they refused and in 1792 Governor Dunmore sent a detachment of troops to force their submission – echoing his military response to civic unrest in New Providence.<sup>73</sup> A jail was built and the Assembly legislated to tax Turks Island salt once again at one farthing per bushel. Thus the long-standing dispute at Turks Islands, pivoting around competing settlement logics and the legalities of taxing a migratory population, was stirred up again. It was beginning to reach boiling point.

### *The cartographic revolution*

During the early-modern period, the Atlantic world was also experiencing a cartographic revolution that saw the emergence of a new conceptualisation of space.<sup>74</sup> This had implications for how Bermudians could assert sovereignty over Turks Islands. Mirroring the rediscovery of key classical texts during the Renaissance, a Florentine scholar translated Ptolemy's *Geography* from ancient Greek into Latin in the early 1400s. While Ptolemy's map projections did not initially attract much interest, by the sixteenth century cartographers across Europe had begun to follow his methods. These methods promoted the use of a coordinate grid to situate all locations geometrically on a two-dimensional map. This introduced the idea of the graticule into their methods – i.e. plotting lines of longitude and latitude in accordance with the stars. In the process it also established 'geometric accuracy of scale, distance and orientation as key cartographic goals'.<sup>75</sup> These techniques 'restructured the fundamental grammar

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<sup>71</sup> The National Archives, Council and Assembly of Bermuda to John Brickwood, 12 August 1789, CO 37/42/50.

<sup>72</sup> The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 2. The specific role of the King's Agent will be explored in Chapter 5.

<sup>73</sup> The National Archives, Governor Henry Hamilton to Secretary of State Henry Dundas, 17 October 1792, CO 37/44/3.

<sup>74</sup> Branch, *The Cartographic State*, pp. 36-67.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

of European cartography'.<sup>76</sup> They are now so engrained in modern understandings of space it is easy to overlook their historical contingency.

This marked a significant departure from earlier mapping techniques. In the medieval period, political authority often resided in a series of unique places where rule was concentrated in urban areas, fading out towards the countryside and periphery.<sup>77</sup> In this understanding of territorial authority, space was not homogenous and anarchical – it was not all of equal value – but rather particular locations were deemed qualitatively more important and jurisdictions could overlap. More importantly, medieval authority was principally claimed in ways that were not territorial. Textual descriptions were chosen over cartographic representation in the establishment and maintenance of medieval rule. The Domesday Book, for example, was a compendium of lists detailing exactly who and what was ruled over, rather than the territorial expanse of that rule.<sup>78</sup> As such, maps were less useful in describing a polity and, prior to the printing press, extremely expensive.<sup>79</sup> When they were produced, homogeneity of scale, distance and orientation were not a part of their production.

For instance, although *mappaemundi* may appear to capture the entire globe within their depiction, in truth their geographical expanse was limited to the Old World, centring on the Holy Lands, surrounded by Asia, Africa and Europe. Their purpose was 'religious instruction': explaining the religious and moral relationships between specific places on the earth's surface and the cosmos by constructing a biblical and classical history within the *mappaemundi* medium.<sup>80</sup> As a result, their geographical content and delineation of political entities were deemphasised; there was no homogeneity in terms of scale, distance and orientation; and they were unable to incorporate new discoveries into their restrained format.

Other medieval maps also had strikingly different logics to Ptolemaic cartography.<sup>81</sup> Itinerary maps traced particular journeys like pilgrimages and sought to highlight specific landmarks and towns along the route for travellers.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-29.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, pp. 49-50.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp. 43-46.

Consequently, landmarks were disproportionately large by present-day standards, while the ‘spaces’ in-between were granted little attention. Distances between places were conveyed in terms of the time it took to travel. Even portolan charts, which have been understood as precursors to Ptolemaic maps, were in fact notably dissimilar. These navigational aids traced coastlines fairly ‘accurately’ in a modern sense, but their emphasis was always on the coast – the interior of continents was often completely ignored. The rhumb lines that connected specific ports together were also, like itinerary maps, drawn on the basis of travel time and not on the physical distances involved.

As such, all these medieval cartographic productions – *mappaemundi*, itinerary maps, and portolan charts – ‘appear...to distort geography and greatly emphasised the importance of places over spaces’.<sup>82</sup> In short, they embodied a heterogeneous understanding of space where specific places, or routes between places, were given disproportionate weight and reflected medieval conceptions of territorial authority based around unique centres of power. Moreover, the rarity of maps in general indicates something else: that space was simply less important when making claims of power in the medieval period.<sup>83</sup>

This would change from the sixteenth century. With the rediscovery of Ptolemy’s *Geography*, cartographers began to adopt his map projection methods at a time when demand was rising for ‘scientific’ knowledge during the Enlightenment. This, alongside the “‘communications revolution” initiated by the printing press’ brought Ptolemaic mapping to a wider, curious and more literate public.<sup>84</sup> As more and more consumers bought, read and used these maps, the Ptolemaic conception of space was gradually normalised. From then on, the equality of scale, distance and orientation that accompanied the coordinate grid ensured places were no longer afforded unique status and could not be disproportionately represented. Moreover, the time it took to travel between places could no longer factor into the representation of distance. Instead, the new conception of space increasingly normalised the idea that space was undifferentiated, homogenous and geometrically divisible.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

However, it was the expansion of European rule into the Americas, and its concurrent demands on cartography, that most significantly altered early-modern claims to space and drove this new model of territorial sovereignty.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the Old World, European rulers could not ‘know’ exactly what was in the Americas upon discovery. Textual descriptions, in the style of the Domesday Book, were impossible to carry out from this distance. As they struggled for alternatives, Ptolemaic mapping offered a solution. For the first time in history, cartographers could produce maps that could plot any location, anywhere in the world, within a geometric two-dimensional projection. These projections could accommodate new discoveries within their coordinate grid and make room for adjustments as more accurate measurements were taken. Rather than claiming a space through a detailed description of its features, Ptolemaic mapping made land geometrically divisible from afar. As Branch has argued, colonial expansion therefore drove demand for these new Ptolemaic techniques in cartography that simultaneously changed how space – and sovereignty – would be understood.<sup>86</sup> Authority would no longer be claimed from the centre-out, but drawn from the boundaries-in. As this chapter will now demonstrate, this cartographic revolution significantly inflected the geographical arguments that Bermudians and Bahamians made for control over Turks Islands at a time when the Bahamas was increasingly preoccupied with dominating the latter.

### *Bermuda’s geographical argument*

In the emerging early-modern conception of space, the geographical proximity of Turks Islands to the Bahamas ensured that, cartographically, Turks Islands fell within a line of longitude and latitude extremely close to the Bahamas. Conversely they appeared far from a potential Bermudian sphere of influence. While obvious to today’s observer given our own understanding of space, these new cartographic techniques in the eighteenth century changed how early-modern Atlantic inhabitants viewed and understood colonial possessions. Consider how in Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.5a the relatively new use of the graticule unavoidably placed Turks Islands in close proximity to the Lucayan

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp. 100-119.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 116.



(Bahamas) archipelago. Notice also the way in which these possessions were shaded, which spoke towards the new linearly-bounded conception of space: the boundaries of Turks Islands were painted dark around the edges, fading into its centre, evoking the impression of homogenous bounded territories. As such, although the status of Turks Islands as official Crown territory was ambiguous at this time, to the reader in Britain this map suggested an undeniable proximity of Turks Islands to the Bahamas chain, offered no hint of the overlapping or complex jurisdictions that existed there, and effaced their connection with Bermuda. If an early-modern map user lacked adequate knowledge of the ocean currents and trade winds operating within this maritime space (see Figure 3.6), it would have been easy and logical for them to assume Turks Islands were under Bahamian, not Bermudian, influence given their close proximity to, and corresponding pink shading with, the Bahamas in this part of the map. Such was the power of the graticule to equalise space and of map shading in suggesting island groupings.



Figure 3.5: Detail from a general chart of the West Indies, 1796. From The British Library, L S de la Rochette, 'A general chart of the West Indies Islands with the adjacent coasts of the Spanish Continent' (London, 1796).

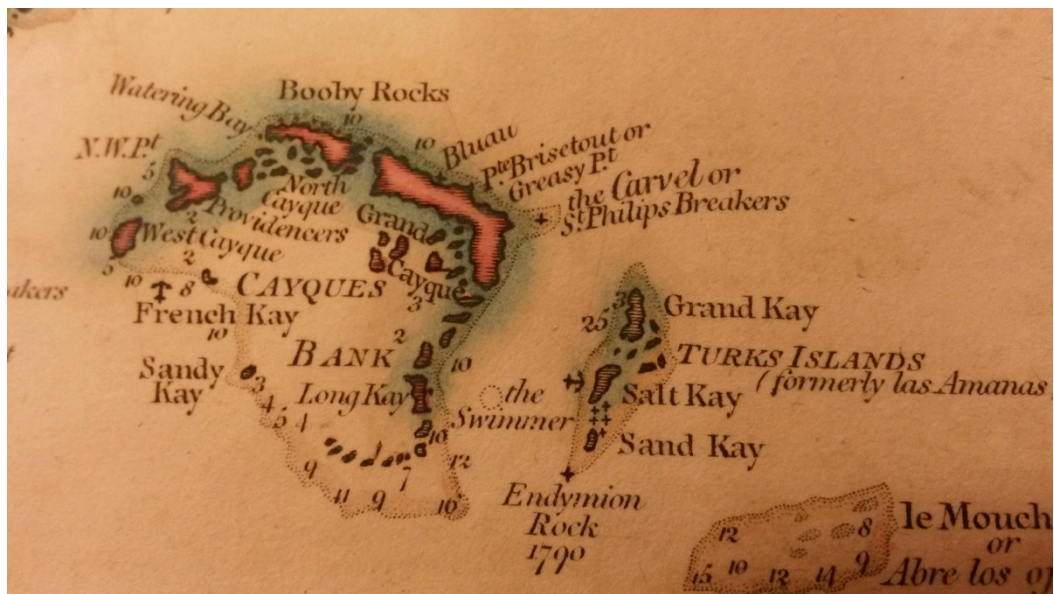


Figure 3.5a: Closer detail of Turks Islands from a general chart of the West Indies, 1796. From The British Library, L S de la Rochette, 'A general chart of the West Indies Islands with the adjacent coasts of the Spanish Continent' (London, 1796).

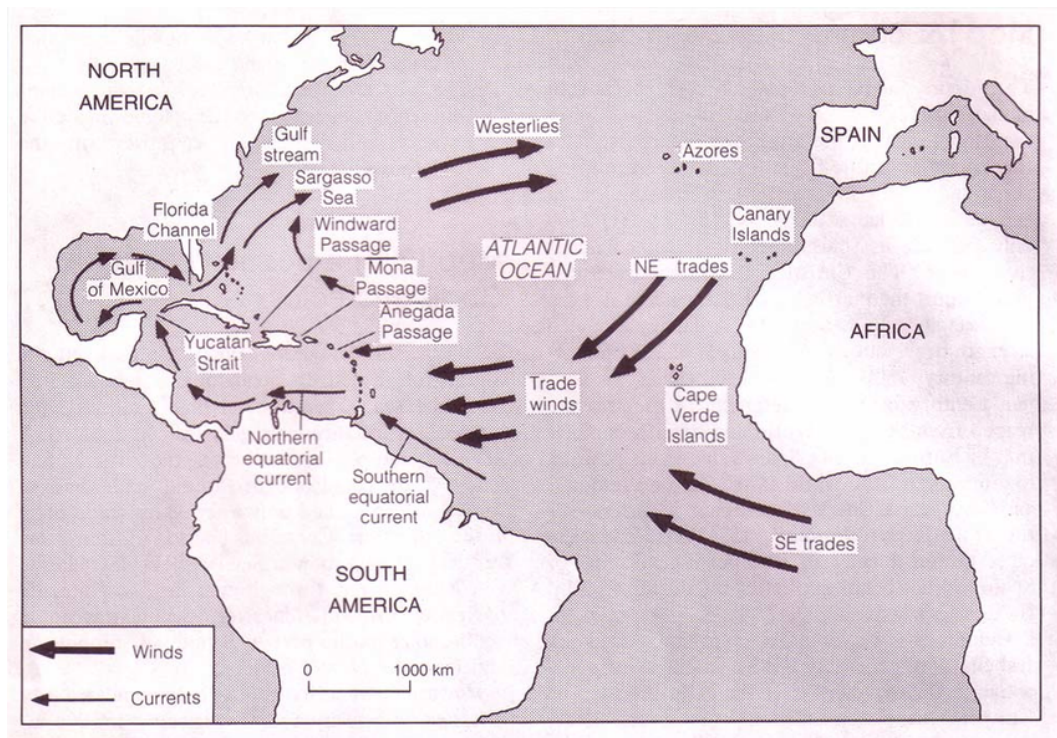


Figure 3.6: Chart of Atlantic Ocean currents and trade winds. From Robert Greenwood, *A Sketchmap History of the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 12.

Bermudians were keen to fight these kinds of assumptions latent within Ptolemaic cartography and even tried to use aspects of it to their advantage. In a petition sent to the Secretary of State in 1790, the Bermuda Government declared,

The Turks Islands have never been deemed part of the Bahama Islands, nor claimed even by the inhabitants of New Providence as such, till within a few years past; neither can they this day be considered as part of the Bahama Islands, as Guthrie, Barrow, Beawes, Postlethwayt and every other geographical writer now extant, expressly declare the extent of the Bahama Islands to be no farther easterly than the seventy-third degree of western longitude; and it is notorious that the Turks Islands come not within this description by three degrees of longitude.<sup>87</sup>

That the Bermuda Government was drawing on popular geographical writers was significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrated the political character of geography and how it was manipulated to make territorial claims. According to Robert Mayhew, geography was explicitly political in the eighteenth century. Politics at this time referred to 'high' politics, i.e. 'discussions of dynastic legitimacy, of representation, and of the constitution', and relied on historical examples for validation.<sup>88</sup> As Mayhew attests, 'To the extent that geography books touched on history...they would unavoidably become a politicised genre'.<sup>89</sup> The works of these abovementioned geographical writers, which consisted of geographical dictionaries, grammars and gazetteers, were large tomes containing descriptions of each country including 'sections on law, religion, constitution and history'.<sup>90</sup> This was well within the scope of politics. As such, in Mayhew's assessment, 'geography books could not but be intended to make political statements' and this was most readily seen in how readers responded to them.<sup>91</sup> The fact the Bermuda Government was referencing William

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<sup>87</sup> 'The Governor, Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations', 10 July 1776, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650-1850* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, pp. 31-32.



Guthrie, John Barrow, Wyndham Beawes and Malachy Postlethwayt in its arguments for Turks Islands' jurisdiction was a strong indication of the books' political character.

Second, this passage belies how Bermudians tried to use widely accepted coordinates to restrict the Bahamas' encapsulation of Turks Islands. Although Turks Islands were not explicitly mentioned by any of the geographical writers, the Bahamas were consistently described. For example, in Guthrie's *A Geographical, Commercial and Historical Grammar* (first published in 1770), it states: 'The Bahamas are situated to the south of Carolina between 22 and 27 degrees north lat. and 73 and 81 degrees west long'.<sup>92</sup> In Barrow's *A New Geographical Dictionary* (1759-1760), it relates: 'Bahama or LUCAYA islands, in the Atlantic Ocean... They lie to the S. of Carolina, from lat. 21 to 27 degrees N. and between long. 73 and 81 deg. W'.<sup>93</sup> In Beawes' *A Merchant's Dictionary* (1754), it reasons: 'Of the Lucayos or Bahama Islands. These lie... between 21 degrees and 27 degrees of Northern Latitude and from 73 degrees to 81 degrees of Western Longitude'.<sup>94</sup> And finally, in Postlethwayt's *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (1774), it describes: 'BAHAMA or LUCAYA ISLANDS. These islands lie... between the 21st and 28th degree of north latitude, and between 72 and 81 of western longitude'.<sup>95</sup> The use of the graticule to demarcate the extent of the Bahamas in all four descriptions indicates how the methods of Ptolemaic mapping had crept into even the overtly textual tradition of these grammars. By the mid-eighteenth century, geographical writers were using the coordinate grid as their preferred method for asserting Britain's sovereignty abroad. The Bermuda Government was therefore making a concerted effort to use these descriptors as a way to legitimise *their* right to Turks Islands by showing these islands were *not* in the Bahamas, according to the latest, most 'accurate' cartographic measurements.

It is worth examining Guthrie's *Grammar* in greater depth. Guthrie was a hack writer working out of Grub Street in London, and produced a broad corpus

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<sup>92</sup> William Guthrie, *An improved system of modern geography, or, A Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar* (new edn, Dublin: John Chambers, 1789), p. 911.

<sup>93</sup> John Barrow, *A New Geographical Dictionary* (2 vols, London: J Coote, 1759-1760), 1, p. 242.

<sup>94</sup> Wyndham Beawes, *The Merchant's Directory* (Dublin: P Wilson, 1754), p. 552.

<sup>95</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (London: W Strahan, 1774), p. 244.

of work including both history and geography books.<sup>96</sup> Like his fellow geographers, his intention would have been primarily to eke out a living by pleasing his publishers with saleable, commercial books. Indeed, so saleable was Guthrie's *Grammar* that it underwent forty-six editions, reaching a wide readership of statesmen, merchants, sailors, and a curious enlightened public. His *Grammar* was also one of the most political, inflected with ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment. In particular, he used it to deemphasise England's uniqueness and press for an idea of universal human progress. He believed in stadial theory but warned England's latest excesses in territorial acquisition and global commerce would lead the nation to luxury and decay. He forewarned problems erupting in empire prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution and argued the colonies should have their own form of government that differed from Britain. In this context, it made good sense for the Bermuda Government to invoke Guthrie's *Grammar* to its defence. Like Guthrie, it favoured an unusual form of government over Turks Islands and often resisted imperial meddling in its own.

However, in other respects, the new cartographic techniques undermined the geographical arguments of Bermudians when older cartographic traditions would have been more supportive. One of the most popular forms of cartographic consumption in early-modern Europe was the printed atlas. This was directed 'toward the literate public as a whole and...driven by commercial motives from the very beginning'.<sup>97</sup> The first printed atlas was published in 1570 and 'the immediate popularity of atlases is evinced by their rapid profusion and their variety'.<sup>98</sup> There were town atlases, pocket atlases, regional atlases, nautical atlases and historical atlases all within a few decades of this publication, and they ranged from 'extraordinarily expensive works for rulers and the richest to smaller, cheaper volumes for the general public'.<sup>99</sup> As such, the printed atlas was a widely disseminated geographical medium that began to mould how Europeans viewed the world.

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Mayhew, 'William Guthrie's geographical grammar, the Scottish enlightenment and the politics of British geography', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, Vol. 115 No. 1 (1999), pp. 19-34.

<sup>97</sup> Branch, *The Cartographic State*, p. 54.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 54-55.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

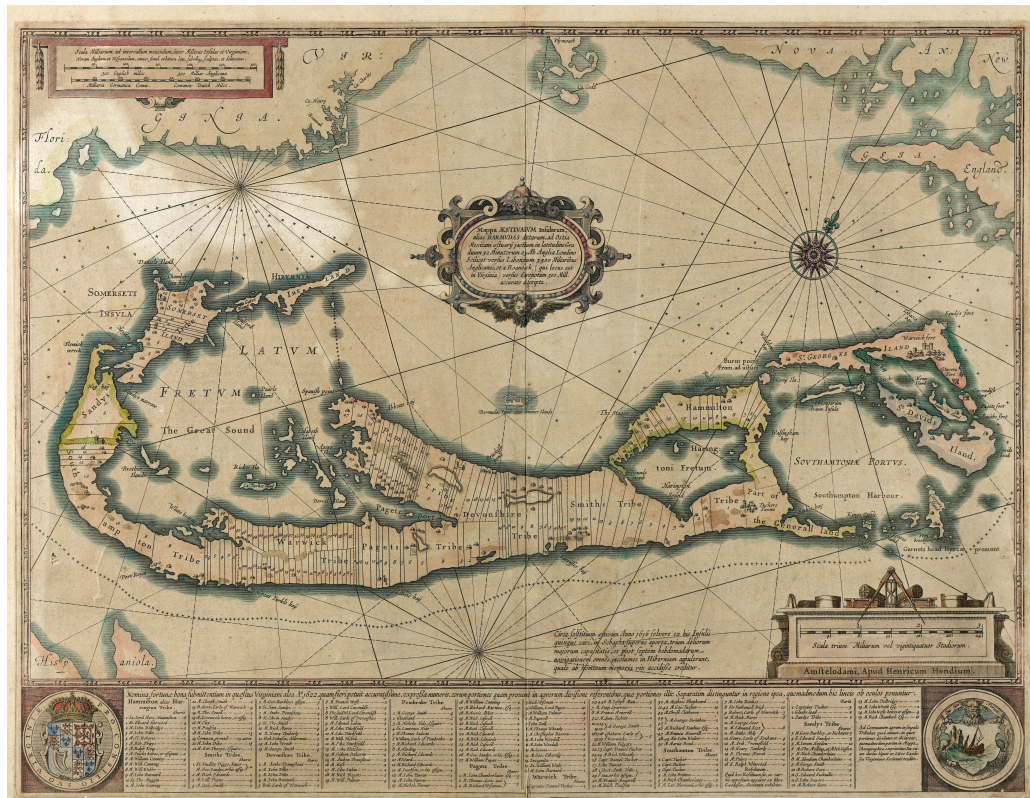


Figure 3.7: Map of Bermuda, 1733. From The British Library, Henricus Hondius, ‘Mappa Aestivarvm Insularum, alias Barmvdas’ (Amsterdam, 1633).

Early atlases did not always undermine Bermuda’s position within the Atlantic for they had not yet fully embraced Ptolemaic methods. For example, Figure 3.7 offers a far more flattering projection of Bermuda’s position than later atlases would depict. This map, published in 1633, was a copy of John Speed’s map of Bermuda. Speed was a cartographer, antiquary and historian, and he was one of the better-known English mapmakers of the early-modern period.<sup>100</sup> His map was the first English map of Bermuda to be printed and included within an atlas, *A Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (1627), which in turn was ‘the first world atlas to be created by an English mapmaker’.<sup>101</sup> Like many of his maps that drew on earlier models, this was actually compiled from Richard Norwood’s famous original survey of Bermuda in 1622 but Speed’s would become the standard map of Bermuda during the seventeenth century.

<sup>100</sup> Anne Dunlop, ‘John Speed, *A Prospect of the most Famous Parts of the World* (London, 1627)’. <<https://connectingcollections-manmel.com/featured-object/speed-map-of-asia-2/>> (30 March 2019).

<sup>101</sup> William Joseph, ‘John Speed (1551/2-1629)’. <<https://www.crouchrarebooks.com/mapmakers/john-speed>> (30 March 2019).

This map is fascinating when understood as a map transitioning between different conceptions of space within its single frame. First and foremost it is a map of Bermuda or the Somers Islands divided into shares with a corresponding numbered list ascribing the owners of these shares. This large foregrounded projection of Bermuda is then overlain onto a second projection that endeavours to locate the island within the wider Atlantic world. However, while there is an attempt at scale on this second projection, it is not homogenous. In truth there is still, intentionally or otherwise, a notable distortion of distances between places. Whichever Bermuda one gazes at, whether it is the smaller Bermuda mapped in the background or, as is more likely, the larger foregrounded projection, Hispaniola (to the bottom-left), Florida (to the top-left) and New England (to the top-right) seem much closer to this central and oversized island than later uses of the graticule would allow. That this map seems to harbour hangovers of a medieval conception of space, which emphasised particular places over spaces and the time travels in-between, is further suggested by the map's use of rhumb lines reminiscent of older portolan charts.

Hence, Speed's map was one grappling with old and new conceptions of space, but in doing so it also offered a more sympathetic depiction of Bermuda's strategic importance and position within the seventeenth-century Atlantic. At that time, Bermuda was considered 'in the eye of all trade' and many believed if it were captured, it would seriously disrupt the flow of English trading networks. Merchant ships, wishing to sail from the Greater to Lesser Antilles, deliberately chose to sail northeast to Bermuda in order to catch the prevailing trade winds. Speed's map was more sensitive to this Atlantic geography by suggesting an easy proximity between Bermuda and its Atlantic neighbours.

For the same reason, in this Age of Sail, Turks Islands were also far easier to reach from Bermuda than from the Bahamas (see Figure 3.6 above). This is evident in a petition from the Bermuda Government to the Board of Trade:

[T]hough Providence is something nearer to the Turks Islands than Bermuda, yet a voyage from Bermuda to Turks Islands is generally performed in one half of the time than it can be done from New Providence, as the Turks Islands and New Providence, which are distant from each other one hundred and sixty leagues, and nearly in the same

parallel of latitude, lie in the tract of a perpetual trade-wind, and consequently the passage from the latter to the former must be tedious.<sup>102</sup>

Due to the prevalence of trade winds, Bermudians claimed they were in a better position to govern the salt islands, despite their physical distance to them. Like Speed's map, they portrayed Bermuda as a colony in good overall proximity to the surrounding colonial possessions of the British Atlantic. While they had earlier used the more 'modern' graticule to delimit the Bahamas, here they used a contrasting geographical logic that was evocative of older, medieval conceptions of space that focused on travel times. It would seem Bermudian petitioners were struggling to put forward a coherent argument, as they mismatched different conceptions of space.

Indeed, as Branch argues, a salient feature of Ptolemaic mapping was its ability to annihilate or delegitimise other forms of territorial and non-territorial authority that could not co-exist within its homogenous, geometric conception of space.<sup>103</sup> The atlases that were increasingly produced in the eighteenth century rapidly adopted Ptolemaic techniques and could no longer include features like travel times or disproportionately represent specific locations that may have been considered qualitatively more important. The power of the graticule to flatten and equalise space harmed the Bermudians' case because Bermuda would now be located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean quite apart from other landmasses.

This is evident in Herman Moll's map (see Figure 3.8) entitled 'A Map of the West Indies or the Islands of America in the North Sea'. This map was printed in London and was part of Moll's *Atlas Minor* (1736), which included sixty-two maps of all parts of the world.<sup>104</sup> His map shaded the colonial territories according to their imperial rulers: pink for Spanish, yellow for English and blue for French. Turks Islands are clearly shaded in yellow and due to its Ptolemaic methods Turks Islands appear geographically within the Bahamian archipelago, whereas Bermuda is but a small mark on the northeast fringe of the

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<sup>102</sup> 'The Governor, Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations', 10 July 1776, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> Branch, *The Cartographic State*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>104</sup> Herman Moll, *Atlas Minor: or a set of sixty-two new and correct maps, of all parts of the world* (2nd edn, London: Thomas Bowles, 1732).



map. Indeed, it is all but lost amongst Moll's insets of the most important Spanish ports in the West Indies, unlikely to attract attention (see Figure 8a).



Figure 3.8: Detail from a map of the West Indies showing Bermuda amongst insets of Spanish ports, 1730-1762. From The British Library, Herman Moll, 'A MAP of the WEST-INDIES or the Islands of AMERICA in the NORTH SEA' (London, 1730-1762).

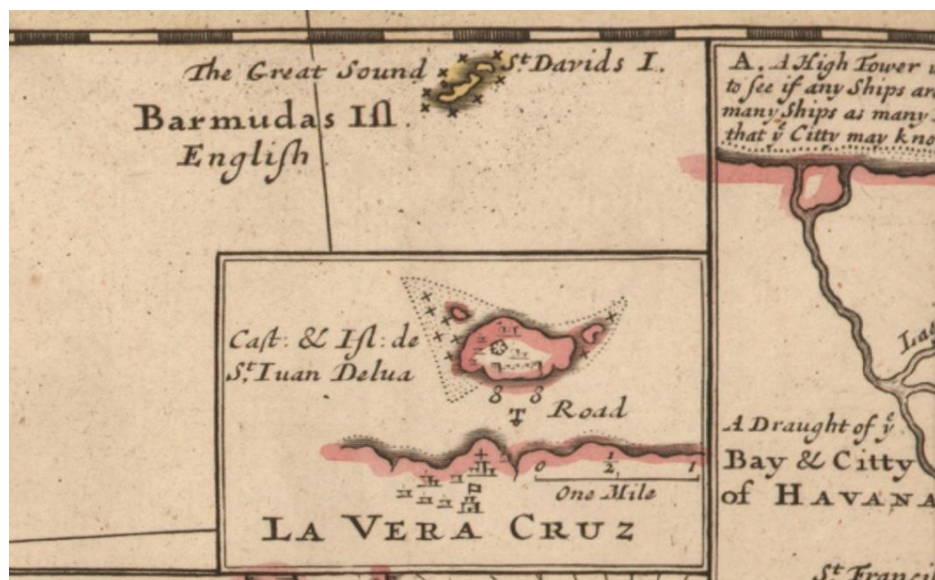


Figure 3.8a: Closer detail from a map of the West Indies showing Bermuda amongst insets of Spanish ports, 1730-1762. From The British Library, Herman Moll, 'A MAP of the WEST-INDIES or the Islands of AMERICA in the NORTH SEA' (London, 1730-1762).





Figure 3.9: Detail from a map of the British Empire in America, 1733. From The British Library, Henry Popple, ‘A Map of the British Empire in America, with the French and Spanish Settlements adjacent thereto’ (Quebec, 1733).

Similarly, Henry Popple’s famous map entitled, ‘A map of the British Empire in America’ (see Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.9a), was emblematic of this foreshortening of Bermuda’s strategic position. This map was printed in 1733 and dedicated to the Crown. While little is known of Popple, members of his family had served within the Board of Trade, ‘a connection that must have been a factor in undertaking the map, his only known cartographic work’.<sup>105</sup> This was the first large-scale map of North America and was later copied by many cartographers. It consisted of twenty sheets that could be conjoined as a wall map or bought as an atlas. It ‘had quasi-legal status, and a copy was sent to each of the governments of each of the colonies’.<sup>106</sup> At the time, it was also considered

<sup>105</sup> Barbara B McCorkle (ed.), *America Emergent: An exhibition of maps and atlases in honor of Alexander O Viator* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> Christie’s, ‘Lot 102: Popple, Henry [d. 1743]. A Map of the British Empire in America with the French, Spanish and the Dutch Settlements Adjacent Thereto. Amsterdam: Covens and Mortier, ca. 1755’, Rare Maps from Kenneth Nebensahl, Inc,

the most ‘accurate’ map available having gained the approbation of Dr Edmund Halley: ‘I have seen the aforementioned Map, which as far as I am Judge, seems to have been laid down with great Accuracy, and to show the position of the different Provinces and Islands in that part of the Globe more truly than any yet Extant’.<sup>107</sup> This highlighted the fact that, by the 1730s, reputable cartography increasingly demanded the incorporation of the most ‘accurate’ Ptolemaic methods, resting on the homogenising effect of the graticule.



Figure 3.9a: Closer detail of the Bahamas and Turks Islands from a map of the British Empire in America, 1733. From The British Library, Henry Popple, ‘A Map of the British Empire in America, with the French and Spanish Settlements adjacent thereto’ (Quebec, 1733).

On Popple’s map, Bermuda appears isolated, lost amongst the larger and bolder lettering of the ‘Atlantic Ocean’. Moreover, as the label ‘Bahamas Islands’ ends just above Turks Islands, the latter appear to be incorporated. The colour coding only serves to reinforce this impression, as the other immediate landmasses to the south and southwest of Turks Islands are shaded as French or Spanish. The swathe of the Bahamas seems naturally to embrace all the islands shaded pink in this part of the map, including Turks Islands. It is no surprise,

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Sale 3476, 1 April 2014. <<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/books-manuscripts/popple-henry-a-map-of-the-5780537-details.aspx>> (18 November 2015).

<sup>107</sup> Dr Edmund Halley quoted in The British Library, Henry Popple, ‘A Map of the British Empire in America, with the French and Spanish Settlements adjacent thereto’ (Quebec, 1733).

then, that map users in Britain who consumed these popular atlases may have increasingly respected Bahamian claims, as they absorbed new ideas of homogenous space and territorial authority that Ptolemaic mapping had been signalling to them for over a century. Bermudians' success in using competing geographical logics for their claim was, over time, gradually delegitimised as older mapping traditions, which may have supported their case, were deemed inferior.

### *The Bahamas' surveys of Turks Islands*

Atlases and grammars were not the only geographical resources imperial authorities had at their disposal to consider the position of Turks Islands. Localised surveys were also available and could prove powerful tools for claiming territorial authority. The rest of this chapter will analyse three surveys produced in 1790 for the Secretary of State to demonstrate how they consciously or otherwise naturalised Bahamian rule over Turks Islands.

As previously discussed, at this time Governor Dunmore was suffering acute financial pressures due to an expanding Bahamian population, declining cotton industry and rising fortification costs. It was logical that within a context of heightened pressure for increased revenue, Governor Dunmore was keen to collect census data on the individuals responsible for salt extraction for taxation purposes. Yet collecting salt duties was difficult if the population of Turks Islands continuously migrated – almost *en masse* – off the islands. It would have proved a hopeless exercise for a Customs Commissioner. As such, Governor Dunmore's surveys from 1790 speak to his designs to know and situate the Bermudian salt gatherers more permanently within Turks Islands – even when Orders in Council decreed land could not be granted there. They indicate that the Governor was serious about laying claim to this territory. This resonates with his character, as his expansionist ambitions were well known.<sup>108</sup> The fact the plans also became the property of the Secretary of State in London further suggests they formed part of the resources of colonisation used to legitimise Bahamian claims over Turks Islands.

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<sup>108</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, pp. 234-240.





Figure 3.10: Detail from a cover plan of Turks Islands for Governor Dunmore, 1790. From The National Archives, Plan of Turks Islands from an actual survey of John Ferguson, Deputy Surveyor, by Order of Governor Dunmore and his Council, 1790, CO 700/TurksIslands1.

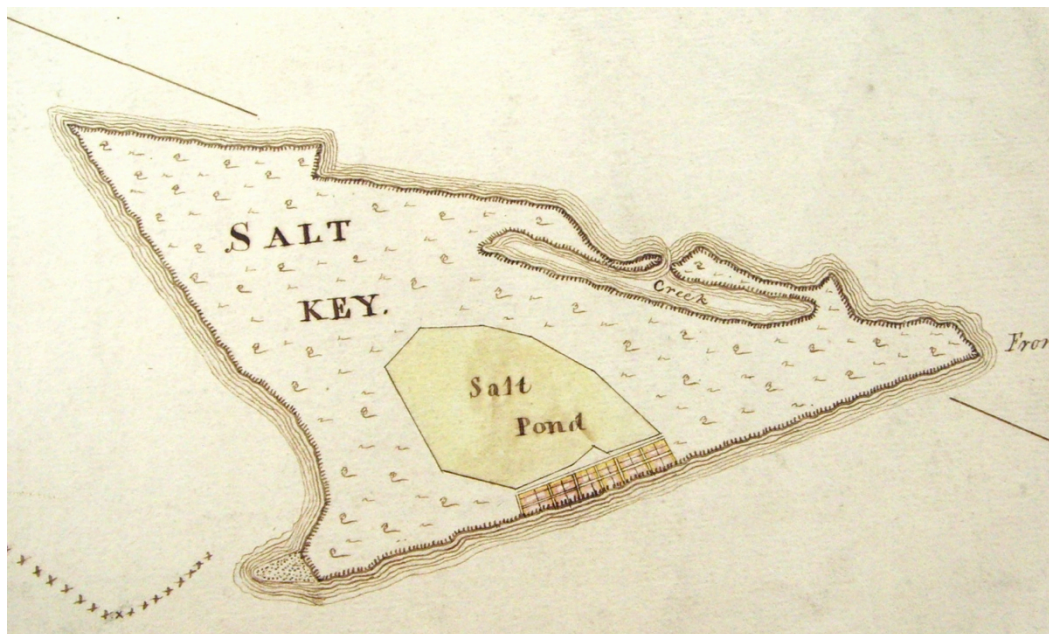


Figure 3.10a: Detail of Salt Key from a cover plan of Turks Islands for Governor Dunmore, 1790. From The National Archives, Plan of Turks Islands from an actual survey of John Ferguson, Deputy Surveyor, by Order of Governor Dunmore and his Council, 1790, CO 700/TurksIslands1.

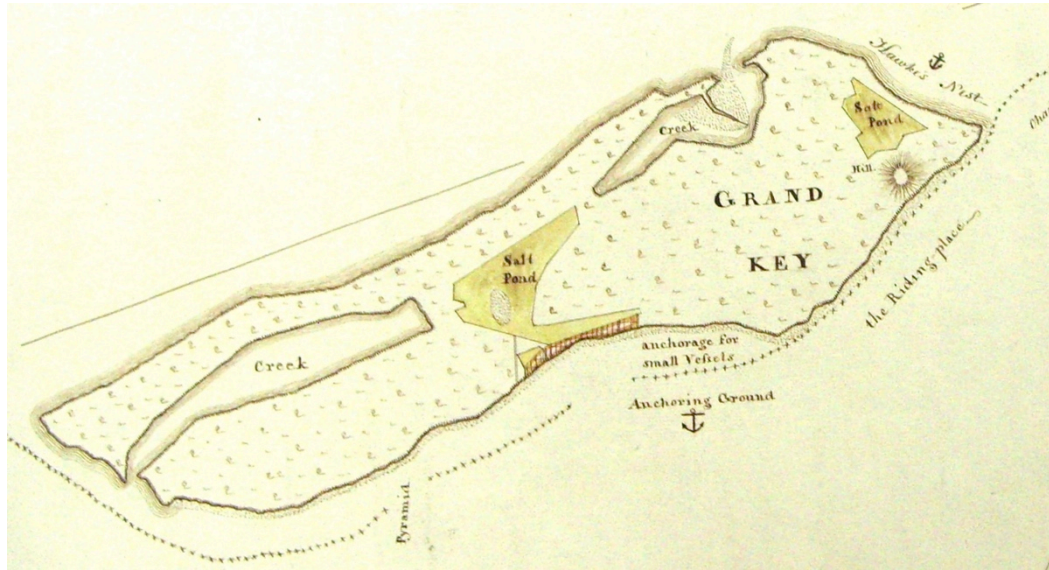


Figure 3.10b: Detail of Grand Turk from a cover plan of Turks Islands for Governor Dunmore, 1790. From The National Archives, Plan of Turks Islands from an actual survey of John Ferguson, Deputy Surveyor, by Order of Governor Dunmore and his Council, 1790, CO 700/TurksIslands1.

In the cover plan's inset (see Figure 3.10), we learn the Deputy Surveyor, John Ferguson, conducted them for Governor Dunmore at the latter's request. Cartographic records are infrequently devoid of power relationships and by issuing a plan of Turks Islands in the name of the Governor of the Bahamas, Governor Dunmore was tacitly laying claim to these salt islands.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the cover plan does not attempt a detailed representation of the topographical features of the islands but specifically focuses the viewer's attention on the salt pans and plots (See Figure 3.10a and Figure 3.10b). These are arranged in a grid-like fashion of order and regularity. As a highly selective representation, what is included and excluded is very telling of the economic and political forces operating on and within this space at this time. Certainly, these plans make it clear: it was the lucrative commodity of salt that drew the Bahamas Governor to

<sup>109</sup> For further information on critical cartography, see J B Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', in Trevor J Barnes and James S Duncan (eds), *Writing World: discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 231-247; J B Harley, 'Rereading the Maps of the Columbian Encounter', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 82 No. 3 (Sept., 1992), pp. 522-536; Christian Jacob, 'Toward a Cultural History of Cartography', *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 48 (1996), pp. 191-198; Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (London: The Guildford Press, 1992), pp. 70-74; and Jeremy Black, *Maps and Politics* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1997).



these islands. Furthermore, there is no specific mention of Bermuda – its influence is effaced.

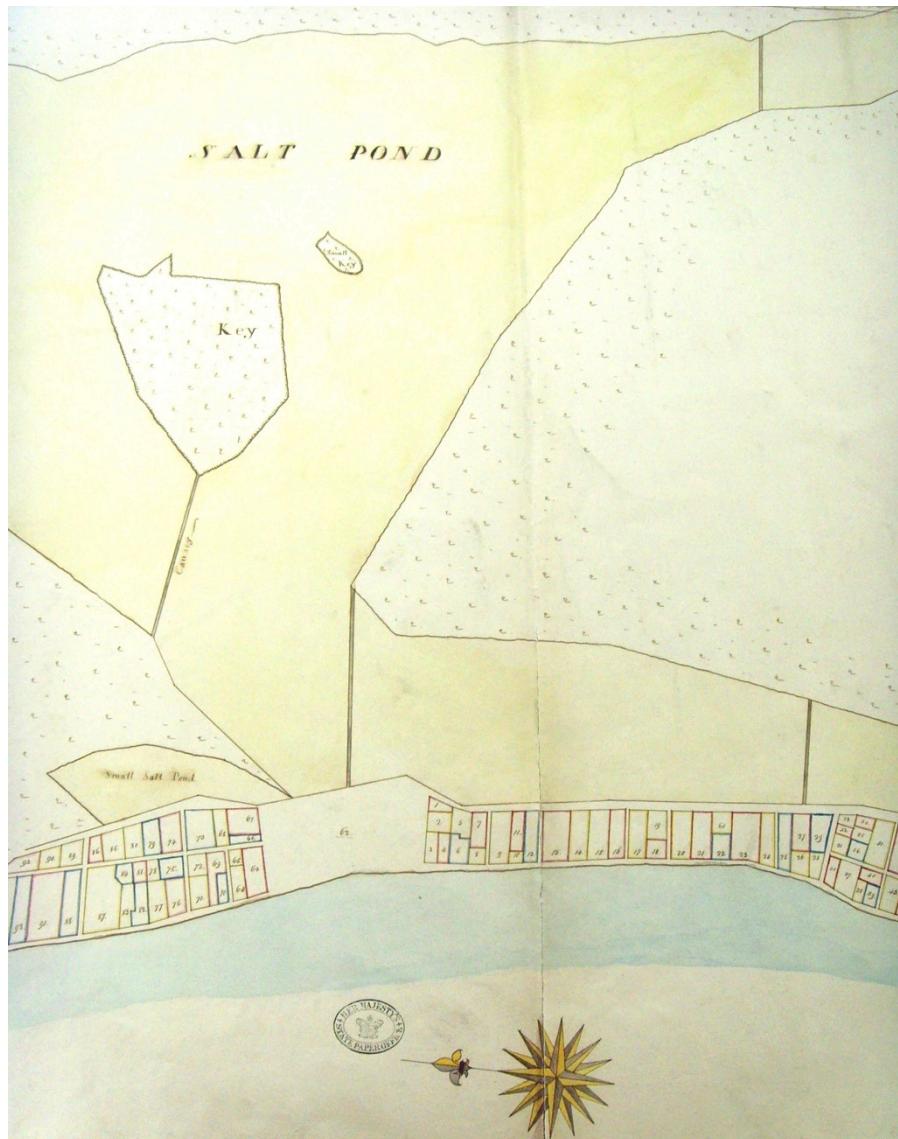


Figure 3.11: Detail from a plan of the salt ponds at Grand Turk showing the lots, 1790. From The National Archives, Plans of Salt Ponds, Turks Islands, showing lots with names of Proprietors by John Ferguson, 1790, CO 700/TurksIslands2.

Ferguson drew two further plans at the same time and in the same style suggesting all three were part of a series. They provide detail on the main islands boasting operational salt ponds: Salt Key and Grand Turk. Not only do they mark the relative size, and location, of the individual plots (see Figure 3.11) but significantly the plans include a corresponding numbered list entitled ‘proprietors

<i>Proprietors of the Lots.</i>			
<i>No</i>			
1	<i>Michael Dean</i> - -	57	<i>John Pruden</i>
2	<i>Thomas Cobb</i> - -	58	<i>Thomas Johnston</i>
3	<i>James Dean</i> - -	59	<i>Thomas Pruden</i>
4	<i>George Summer</i> -	60	<i>John Pruden</i>
5	<i>Robert Whitney</i> -	61	<i>John Dill</i>
6	<i>John Cooper</i> - -	62	<i>Public Ground</i>
7	<i>Sam<sup>l</sup> Darrel</i> -	63	<i>Paul Bascomb</i>
8	<i>William Newbald</i> -	64	<i>William Miller Esq<sup>r</sup></i>
9	<i>Hon<sup>ble</sup> Alex<sup>r</sup> Murray</i>	65	<i>Joseph Basden</i>

Figure 3.11a: Closer detail from a plan of the salt ponds at Grand Turk detailing the ‘proprietors of the lots’, 1790. From The National Archives, Plans of Salt Ponds, Turks Islands, showing lots with names of Proprietors by John Ferguson, 1790, CO 700/TurksIslands2.

of the lots’ (see Figure 3.11a). Like the cover plan, these two further plans focus exclusively on the salt extraction industry but, in addition, they are loaded politically by expressing the idea of proprietorship. A proprietor implies legally agreed tenure to someone who has indefinite rights to the plot in question. A proprietor gives the impression of permanence, of land that can be sequestered in a will to a dedicated recipient. Observing this survey, the reader would have the impression that habitation on Turks Islands was permanent and settled. The implication that these were *Bahamian* proprietors does not matter as much as the idea that there was something like proprietorship itself on Turks Islands when grants of land were specifically disallowed. These surveys of 1790 do not conjure the image of a migrating merchant who worked the ponds according to a Head Rights System. Nor do they imply a situation that changed on an annual basis. Yet, that was exactly how, repeatedly, these islands had been cultivated up to this point. Temporary, migratory forms of activity are absent within these surveys. As Branch has argued, in more modern maps, ‘the features to be



included are those defined as permanent’, but ‘the distinction between what is seen as permanent and temporary is an arbitrary one and reflects an implicit norm that values settled and built human space over temporary or migratory forms of activity’.<sup>110</sup> It was precisely this implicit norm that lay at the core of the diplomatic struggles that had taken place over Turks Islands in the late eighteenth century. The Secretary of State, sitting in London, would have received these surveys and their implication: that there were settled proprietors taking charge of the ponds. In a cartographic sleight of hand, these surveys obfuscated any notion of the salt gatherers’ migratory, maritime, transient and indeed Bermudian identity. It cemented visually on paper what was, until the end of the eighteenth century, highly contested on the ground.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that Turks Islands’ settlement followed a fairly unique pattern within the British Caribbean. Whereas on the sugar islands settlement was quickly characterised as permanent, fixed and terrestrial – demonstrably because of the costs involved in building, maintaining and defending plantations – the salt islands witnessed an initial stage of settlement that was principally maritime, migratory and transient. Even when interesting parallels can be found in other areas of empire, such as in Barbuda, British Honduras, and the pan-Caribbean turtle commons, Turks Islands’ particular settlement patterns were singular and generally not mirrored elsewhere. Much of their character in this early stage was owed to the way Bermuda’s niche economy and salt gathering interacted with one another: whereas eighteenth-century Bermudian merchants and seafarers pursued a vast array of maritime activities, one of which was salt gathering, the seasonality of salt meant it could only be produced for part of the year while its low up-front costs undercut the risk of loss during an absence. This paved the way for a migratory, maritime and transient settlement. It was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that this nomadic way of life came under threat as successive Bahamas Governments fought with Bermuda for control over these saline spaces. In the diplomatic wrangling that ensued, London

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<sup>110</sup> Branch, *The Cartographic State*, p. 40.

was eventually forced to intervene and ruled that Turks Islands were a part of the Bahamas in 1803. By the early nineteenth century, a more permanent and terrestrial habitation, more typical of the Caribbean as a whole, had developed, signifying that territorial authority had passed from Bermuda to the Bahamas.

In the diplomatic wrangling that effected this change, conceptions of space played a demonstrative part. The cartographic revolution and particularly the prevalence of Ptolemaic techniques significantly inflected the geographical logics Bahamians and Bermudians used in their territorial claims. While medieval conceptions of space that had revolved around the idea of unique places, and the travel times in-between, may have been more flattering to Bermuda's position, the new and popular graticule and its accompanying notions of scale, orientation and distance increasingly delegitimised these ideas. At the same time, they made Turks Islands appear naturally an adjunct of the Bahamas. In this struggle, the Bermuda Government failed to produce a coherent argument, mismatching different and competing conceptions of space in a desperate attempt to maintain control. Bermuda's case was further destabilised by local surveys, such as Governor Dunmore's in 1790, which gave the misleading impression to London ministers that there was something like permanent settlement at Turks Islands. In this way, geographical sources of the period were not neutral mirrors of society but charged political tools that were actively used to formulate territorial claims to space. The cartographic revolution marked a significant paradigm shift in how Europeans viewed and understood the world around them, but on the salty fringes of empire it also weakened Bermuda's position and consequently endangered its salt gatherers' nomadic way of life.

This chapter has sought to understand the role cartographic sources played within the diplomatic struggles between Bermuda and the Bahamas, but the fight for Turks Islands' jurisdiction was far more layered and complex. The next chapter will seek to address this by examining another popular political tool in this intra-colonial feud: the written petition. It will do so in the context of London's intervention to better understand why the Bermuda Government failed to convince those in power of its right to Turks Islands despite the islands' historical inter-connections.

## Chapter 4: ‘This Agency has done much Mischief’: The Struggle for Turks Islands’ Sovereignty, c. 1799-1803

### Introduction

In 1769, Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough reflected on the difficulty of governing Turks Islands ‘under such peculiar Circumstances’.<sup>1</sup> These ‘peculiar Circumstances’ prevailed for the best part of half a century. With the appointment of a Turks Islands King’s Agent in 1766, ‘an officer acting under a Commission of so new and unusual a nature’, Turks Islands ceased being subject to a purely informal self-organising system run by Bermudian salt gatherers and merchants, yet neither did they come under strict Bahamian authority.<sup>2</sup> Exactly where Turks Islands sat within the milieu of Caribbean colonial jurisdictions was frustratingly vulnerable to interpretation.

These frustrations erupted and festered with a vengeance at the end of the eighteenth century when, after a long and protracted debate in London, the King’s Attorney and Solicitor General finally ruled that Turks Islands were a part of Bahamian jurisdiction. For the first time the Royal Assent was granted to the Bahamian legislature to extend its general laws to Turks Islands, including its contentious salt taxation laws, and Turks Islands were offered political representation in the same. The tense and drawn-out process that led to this final decision is the subject of this chapter. By paying close attention to the swathe of colonial petitions that were sent to the British Government *and* to the ensuing confusion evident amongst London ministers, this chapter will argue that Turks Islands were so hard to ‘situate’ precisely because they had rested at a unique political interstice within the imperial governing system for so long.

Moreover, the involvement of the British Government at this late stage, as a final adjudicator, reflects how issues surrounding Turks Islands’ jurisdiction had erupted in the colonies themselves: London’s part in this story was essentially reactive. By the end of the eighteenth century, the maritime and migratory ties between Turks Islands and Bermuda were bonds the Bahamas

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas, 4 August 1769, BT 6/74.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Government was determined to break. Salt gatherers *would* pay the Bahamas Government's salt taxes; they *would* become inhabitants. In their efforts to stop this from happening, Bermudians from all levels of white society sent a flurry of petitions to the British Government pleading for its intervention and protection. London was forced, reluctantly, to intervene, but it would prove a difficult exercise, as Turks Island issues, revolving around self-identification, migratory lifestyles, and transient settlement, jarred with Bahamian intentions and jurisdictional rights.

In order to tease out these threads, this chapter will begin by providing contextual background on the Acts of Assembly that were passed in the Bahamas in 1799 and 1802. These Acts initiated a new phase in the debate over Turks Islands' jurisdiction and generated a cycle of colonial petitions, one of which was the Address of 1802 from the Bermuda Council and Assembly to the King of Great Britain. This Address, with its supplements, shall be analysed in two ways. First, the path it took to reach the British Crown will be examined and then its contents explored. The chapter will then widen its focus from the letter of this Address towards its inclusion as part of a mass of material that was collated by His Majesty's Council and sent to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations for further deliberation. While the diversity of the papers will be discussed, two bodies of memorials prove particularly striking: that of Alexander Murray, the King's Agent of Turks Islands, and those of the Governor and Colonial Agent of the Bahamas. The chapter will then conclude by appraising the decision-making process of London's ministers. Faced with this mountain of material, the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations organised a hearing, before referring the issue to His Majesty's Attorney and Solicitor General for consideration. In the end, these chief law officers had to answer a deceptively simple question: were Turks Islands a part of Bahamian jurisdiction or not? The memorials examined in this chapter should reveal why that answer was far from obvious, and why Turks Islands operated 'under such peculiar circumstances' for over half a century.

## **An intra-colonial constitutional crisis**

On 11 November 1799, the Bahamas Assembly passed ‘An Act for authorising and empowering the Inhabitants of the several Islands and Districts therein mentioned to send representatives to the General Assembly’.<sup>3</sup> Those islands included Turks Islands, Caicos Islands, Crooked Island and Watlings Island. It received the Royal Assent by His Majesty in Council on 25 June 1800. Under the preamble of the Act it stated, ‘it shall and may be lawful for the freeholders and House keepers of the Islands commonly called Turks Islands to elect and send one Member to represent them in the present General Assembly and in every future General Assembly of these Islands’.<sup>4</sup> Following its implementation, Turks Islands could therefore legally take a seat at the Bahamian Assembly in Nassau, the capital of New Providence, over 500 miles away. For the Bahamas Government, this was viewed as an extension of a right to subjects already within their jurisdiction and was not an attempt to suddenly seize sovereignty over Turks Islands. Yet, for the salt gatherers this was *the* moment when the Bahamian legislature attempted to definitively ‘annex’ Turks Islands, a term endowed with all its negative connotations.<sup>5</sup>

The salt gatherers’ main concern in 1799 was the threat of increased taxation following the extension of Bahamian laws to Turks Islands. Such fear proved well founded. In April 1802, the Bahamas Assembly passed a colonial tax law with the purpose of raising revenues for the colonial government.<sup>6</sup> It included a duty levied on salt and while it did not specifically target Turks Islands, the latter were the largest salt-producing islands in the entire Bahamian archipelago. With the passage of the Representation Act, the Bahamas Assembly viewed it their indisputable right to place a duty on Turks Island salt. Yet, the

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<sup>3</sup> The National Archives, An Act for authorising and empowering the Inhabitants of the several Islands and Districts therein mentioned to send representatives to the General Assembly No. 319, 2 December 1799, CO 25/10 f. 290.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of certain Inhabitants of Bermuda and others resorting to the Turks Islands for the purpose of gathering salt to the Governor, Council and Assembly of Bermuda, 30 June 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 51-54.

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives, An Act for laying Duties upon Sundry Goods, Wares and Merchandise therein mentioned for the purpose of raising a Revenue for the support of the Government and directing how the same shall be collected and applied, 6 April 1802, BT 6/74.

history of uncertainty regarding the government of Turks Islands prevented any simple acquiescence from her 'subjects'. It was these two Acts, on representation and taxation, that signalled a new and decisive phase in the diplomatic feud over Turks Islands.

*The Address of 1802 and its path to London*

In August 1802, Bermuda's Colonial Agent, John Brickwood, was in possession of an Address from the Assembly and Council of Bermuda to the King in Britain, regarding recent grievances suffered by the Bermudian salt gatherers at Turks Islands.<sup>7</sup> This Address was accompanied by several annexed supplements and was the culmination of a large amount of correspondence that had crisscrossed the Atlantic between Bermuda, Turks Islands and London for over a year. While Brickwood was responsible for laying it before the Secretary of State, who in turn would lay it before the King's Council, its lifecycle up until that point is worth examining. By piecing together the pathways this Address took, we can learn how colonial petitioners understood the apparatus of government as a 'multi-layered formation' and what fissures petitioners tried to exploit in order to seek redress.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it reveals the persistent ties between Turks Islands and Bermuda, as the former channelled its concerns through the latter.

The history of this Address began on 5 June 1801 when a poll was set up on Turks Islands for the election of a member to the Bahamas Assembly following the Representation Act of 1799. Writing to an acquaintance in Bermuda, Nathaniel Butterfield, a Bermudian salt gatherer, reported that 'not a vote was given'.<sup>9</sup> 'The people all refused, and presented an Address to the [King's] Agent stating their Reasons'.<sup>10</sup> This Address to the King's Agent was sent via Butterfield's correspondence to members of the Bermuda Assembly.

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<sup>7</sup> The National Archives, Letter from the Colonial Agent of Bermuda John Brickwood to the Under-Secretary of State John Sullivan, 31 August 1802, CO 37/52 f. 279.

<sup>8</sup> Lex Heerma van Voss (ed.), *Petitions in Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Nathaniel Butterfield to James Tucker, 20 July 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Alongside it, Butterfield related the renewed sufferings of the salt gatherers and presumed,

As the Legislature of Bermuda represents perhaps more than nineteen out of twenty [of] the Gatherers of Salt here, it is thought unnecessary, to address them from hence, but merely to mention the renewal of the Providence interference, assuring ourselves that nothing more will be wanting in order to engage them in such measures as bid fairest for the removal of our difficulties.<sup>11</sup>

However, it would become clear this would not be sufficient if the grievances of the salt gatherers were to be addressed to the highest levels of authority, especially if their chosen channel was through the Bermudian legislature.

At first, the Bermuda Assembly called for a committee to discuss the recent disagreements at Turks Islands and actions to be taken. Three members were appointed and after reading Butterfield's correspondence, they wrote him,

We apprehend there cannot be the smallest doubt that our Legislature will leave nothing undone, to cultivate and maintain the Commercial connections at present subsisting between Bermuda and the Turks Islands, but as that connection and our relative situation in other respects will not be so immediately obvious to the Administration in England, as they are to us...it is expedient a Complaint of the Grievances you labour under, *should in the first instance form from you to our Legislature*, either by Petition or Memorial, as you shall judge most proper.<sup>12</sup>

The committee members made it clear that in order for Bermuda's legislature to get involved, grievances would need to be addressed through the proper channels. As David Lambert has urged, it is important to understand West Indian petitions as 'material objects whose potential efficacy derived from how, and in what textual company, they travelled'.<sup>13</sup> Bermudian Assembly members were aware of how peculiar the Turks Island-Bermudian connection might appear in London, given the sheer expanse of the Sargasso Sea that stretched between the

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<sup>11</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Nathaniel Butterfield to James Tucker, 14 March 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 61-62.

<sup>12</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Benjamin Harvey, Cornelius Bascome and James Christie Esten to Nathaniel Butterfield, 27 July 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 63-64. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> David Lambert, 'The counter-revolutionary Atlantic: white West Indian petitions and proslavery networks', *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (Jun., 2005), p. 405.

islands. While it was understandable to Bermudians why its legislature had a right to be involved, this right was by no means obvious to all: ‘A representation from yourselves will...furnish the strongest Ground of Authority for the interference of our Legislature, which authority might otherwise seem questionable at first sight to administration at home’.<sup>14</sup> Nor could the right for Bermuda to intervene in the current situation be explained through past interventions. The committee members stated clearly, ‘that right should be immediately evident from the papers submitted to Administration; and not to be left to be collected from former proceedings’.<sup>15</sup> The salt gatherers would have to submit a new petition to the Bermudian legislature, if a process of redress was to be commenced.

Alongside this dialogue with the salt gatherers, the committee members ensured Bermuda’s Colonial Agent was primed for the upcoming Address. On 5 August 1801, they wrote to Brickwood explaining the formation of their committee and their desire to place into his hands all materials ‘within our reach respecting the late interference of the Bahamian legislature with Turks Islands’.<sup>16</sup> This included a copy of the Representation Act of 1799, the petition of the salt gatherers to the Turks Islands King’s Agent with his reply, revenues from the salt gathered for the Crown, the number of people presently receiving shares in Turks Islands, the aforementioned letters from Butterfield, and, finally, a copy of a memorial from 1790. Further to this, they informed Brickwood that a petition from the salt gatherers to the Bermudian legislature was duly expected and that they had every reason to believe Governor Beckwith of Bermuda would mention the Bahamian interference in his latest dispatch to London. Brickwood responded in January 1802, informing the committee he had placed copies of their transmitted papers in front of the Secretary of State.<sup>17</sup> With regards to the salt trade carried on by Bermudians at Turks Islands, Brickwood had proven himself a strong advocate: ‘I am so fully acquainted as to impress me with an active zeal in my endeavours to obtain all that you so reasonably claim for the protection of

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<sup>14</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Benjamin Harvey, Cornelius Bascome and James Christie Esten to Nathaniel Butterfield, 27 July 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 63-64.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Underline present in original manuscript document.

<sup>16</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Benjamin Harvey, Cornelius Bascome and James Christie Esten to Nathaniel Butterfield, 5 August 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 55-56.

<sup>17</sup> The National Archives, Letter from John Brickwood to Benjamin Harvey, Cornelius Bascome and James Christie Esten, 20 January 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 68-69.



that branch of Trade'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Bermudian legislature had manoeuvred for Brickwood to be its main courier for this latest Address.

The support of the Bermuda Governor was also necessary. In July 1802, the Assembly and Council wrote a joint Address to Governor Beckwith informing him of their plans to send an Address to the King representing the grievances of the salt gatherers, and simultaneously furnished him with a copy of that Address and its accompanying documents. Before signing off, the authors solicited the Governor's assistance, trusting 'that Your Excellency will give every support to an application, on the success of which the prosperity of these Islands so materially depends'.<sup>19</sup> After receiving this Address presented by the Council and Assembly, Governor Beckwith submitted it to London in July 1802. By including it within his official dispatch, he improved the Address' credibility, and gave it a context. He explained that the two Houses had 'framed an humble Address to The King, as they did upon former and similar attempts, which they successfully resisted, under His Majesty's Paternal Protection'; and that this Address, and its supplementary documents, were to be conveyed to the Secretary of State via Brickwood.<sup>20</sup> The Governor's support for the Address was fully endorsed, as he ended his dispatch:

I beg leave to add that the decision is of the deepest importance to his Majesty's Subjects in this Colony who now, in company with their fellow subjects of the Empire at large, find a free trade...concentrated...into a Monopoly in favour of the Bahama Islands.<sup>21</sup>

This was not the first time Governor Beckwith had officially advocated his support. Indeed, a year before, he had touched on the subject to the Secretary of State, noting he had heard that an Act had passed in the Bahamas authorising and empowering Turks Islanders to send a representative to Nassau and in the same dispatch he submitted a copy of a letter that his predecessor had received in 1796. This letter, issued from the Committee of Council for Trade and Plantations, reassured the then Bermuda Governor that 'all His Majesty's

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives, Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to Governor of Bermuda George Beckwith, 20 July 1802, CO 37/51 f. 351.

<sup>20</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Governor of Bermuda George Beckwith to Secretary of State Lord Holbart, 21 July 1802, CO 37/51 f. 349.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Subjects have an equal right to resort to Turks Islands for the purpose of gathering Salt' and should any 'specific Regulation or other Act' compromise that right, it would be attended to.<sup>22</sup> By raising this issue with the Duke of Portland at an early stage of the proceedings, Governor Beckwith was forewarning this subject might require clarification in the near future.

Thus, through the labour of its committee members, the Bermudian legislature had managed to align its diplomatic efforts: from grassroots mobilisation among the salt gatherers to a multipronged offensive at the highest levels of colonial government. In this chain of petitioning, that connected the salt gatherers, to the two Houses of the Bermudian legislature, to the Governor, to the Colonial Agent, and finally to the Secretary of State and King's Council, it is clear the right channels had to be worked for a case to be presented effectively. Even more stridently, it signifies how close the socioeconomic ties were between Bermuda and Turks Islands. For this amount of labour and correspondence to be mobilised with such meticulous attention to detail, the Bermudian legislature had to have good reasons for doing so. The fact remains the salt gatherers appealed to the King through the Bermudian legislature, not through the Bahamian legislature. It was a classic example of how petitions have been used to go over the heads of powerful elite intermediaries (in this case, the Bahamas Assembly) in order to appeal to centres of power.<sup>23</sup> On 31 August 1802, Brickwood laid the Address with its several supplements in front of the Secretary of State.

#### *The Address of 1802 and its contents*

The Address of 1802 was a large document that consisted of a covering Address from the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King, affixed with a supplement that directed the reader to several appendices marked A to M.<sup>24</sup> This section unpicks its main threads to demonstrate the clear self-identification

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<sup>22</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Governor of Bermuda George Beckwith to Secretary of State the Duke of Portland, 7 August 1801, CO 37/50 f. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

between Bermuda and Turks Islands and the distance salt gatherers felt towards the Assembly in Nassau.

As Lex Heerma van Voss has argued, there is utility in studying the content of petitions. As much for rulers in the past, as for historians in the present, ‘they offered a window upon the mind of the general population’.<sup>25</sup> The right to petition centres of power was engrained in English political culture, and it was a right that extended to all sectors of society. In this way, any individual or collective body was permitted to petition the King should other forms of redress prove unsuccessful. As such, historians can burrow into the frustrations, concerns and desires of different members of society by analysing the content of their petitions. In a colonial context, this is useful for prising apart the dissonances that may have existed between the metropole and its colonies, and between different sectors of colonial society. To be sure, the deferential style that pervades petitions should not be accepted uncritically. There was a formulaic way of writing petitions and it often required a professional hand. However, ‘whatever influences the way in which demands are voiced, demands have to be voiced as that is the point of a petition’.<sup>26</sup> As such, the Address of 1802 and its appendages can reveal much about the concerns of the salt gatherers and the Bermudian legislature, as well as the relationship between the two.

The Address was formulated around a request that the King would act ‘to prevent any Authority whatever of the Legislature of New Providence being exercised at Turks Islands’ in light of the recent Acts passed by the Bahamian Assembly.<sup>27</sup> This reveals the still-held belief of the Bermudian legislature that Turks Islands existed within a separate jurisdiction to the Bahamas Government, whose recent actions were an aggressive form of encroachment. This is underscored in the supplement to the Address, where the authors state:

The said [Bahamian] Legislature have recently endeavoured to procure by finesse under the mask of a law, a jurisdiction as they affect to suppose over the Turks Islands, which they must have been sensible

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<sup>25</sup> Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, ‘The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King’, 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 f. 78.

previous to the passing of such law, they never could have obtained in any other manner.<sup>28</sup>

The latent suggestion is that the Representation Act of 1799 was produced in secrecy, without consultation with the Bermuda Government or the salt gatherers. This is echoed in a letter written from a salt gatherer to an acquaintance in Bermuda in July 1801. He related that the King's Agent, who had returned to Turks Islands from a visit to England, 'on his arrival here, expressed great surprise at the attempt [of the Act of 1799], which he deprecated very much – never having heard a syllable of it'.<sup>29</sup> Upon hearing this news, the King's Agent hastened to Nassau to take up his seat on the Council to protect Turks Island interests.

It becomes clear that this 'privilege' of political representation bestowed on the Turks Islanders was not one they sought. The supplement to the Address is quite strong on this point:

As to allowing the Salt Rakers at Turk Islands to be represented in the General Assembly of New Providence, they never wished it, a stronger proof of which cannot possibly be adduced, than that they have invariably refused to elect any Representative whatever.<sup>30</sup>

Evidently, the salt gatherers did not agitate for the franchise. Rather, they saw their natural representation as being within the Bermuda Government where 'their permanent residence is, where their Interest Depends in Common with the rest of their Countrymen; and where they pay Seat and Lot'.<sup>31</sup> Representation in the Bahamian legislature was considered an oppression, not a privilege.

To justify this aversion, the Address drew upon a multiplicity of sources within its appendices. These sources covered issues of a demographic,

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<sup>28</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices', 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

<sup>29</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Nathaniel Butterfield to James Tucker, 20 July 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 62-63.

<sup>30</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices', 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

environmental, economic, and constitutional nature – a multipronged attack – that to a large extent reprimanded the preamble of the Representation Act of 1799 for being disingenuous. This preamble stated:

Whereas the Turks Islands, the Caicos, Crooked Island, and Watlings Island have now become of importance to our Majesty and to the British Empire, on account of their *increased population, agriculture, and contribution of considerable sums towards the support of this Government*...it is therefore reasonable that they should be authorised to send Members to represent them in the General Assembly.<sup>32</sup>

Demographically, the authors of the Address pointed out that those who resided on Turks Islands were, in 1801, still predominantly Bermudians. Appendix E states, that of the 160 white persons on Grand Turk, 144 were Bermudian, and of the 363 enslaved persons, 288 were attached to Bermudian masters.<sup>33</sup> This meant that 83 per cent of the population at Grand Turk were either free Bermudian or enslaved to free Bermudians. Given this statistic, it is perhaps understandable that Turks Islanders did not associate strongly with the Bahamas Government, especially when it is considered Turks Islands were geographically distant, lying 500 miles southeast of Nassau. Moreover, speaking to the preamble's assertion that Turks Islands' population had recently increased, the supplement declares that the population of Turks Islands 'is by no means certain, but is always more or less fluctuating according to the numbers of Bermudians who annually resort thither'.<sup>34</sup> Annual, migratory and maritime visitations to Turks Islands, as discussed in Chapter 3, had continued throughout this period. The islands' population fluctuated each year depending on the economic conditions at Bermuda, or the yield of the salt season at Turks Islands. Demographically, the

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<sup>32</sup> The National Archives, An Act for authorising and empowering the Inhabitants of the several Islands and Districts therein mentioned to send representatives to the General Assembly No. 319, 2 December 1799, CO 25/10 f. 290. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'Appendix E of A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands', 20 July 1801, CO 37/52 f. 85.

<sup>34</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices', 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

authors of the Address demonstrated the enduring connections between Turks Islands and Bermuda and laid bare the preamble's glaring errors on their settlement patterns.

Yet if demographics offered a good reason for eschewing Bahamian rule, so did environmental ones. The Address reiterated that in terms of agriculture, there were few opportunities on Turks Islands: 'It was and is no less notorious, that the Lands of Turks Islands, if not absolutely inarable, are the least productive and the worst adapted for Cultivation of any in the Known World'.<sup>35</sup> They believed that the preamble's justification for extending representation on the basis of improved agriculture was extraordinary. It betrayed the ignorance of Nassau for their local situation. To further underscore their environmental counter-argument, they again invoked, as in 1790, the geographical expertise of 'Guthrie, Beawes and many other Geographical writers' who had declared that Turks Islands did not fall within the line of longitude for the Bahamas and pointed out that a journey from Turks Islands to Nassau took twice the time it took to reach Bermuda due to prevailing trade winds (see Chapter 3).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, a recurrent complaint of the King's Agent within his dispatches was the limited intercourse between Turks Islands and Nassau and the difficulty of sending letters between the two. Communication between Bermuda and Turks Islands was so much more reliable and frequent that in one letter to the Secretary of State, the (acting) King's Agent recommended his return dispatches be sent via Bermuda rather than Nassau.<sup>37</sup>

Yet though demographic and environmental arguments were important, they were not necessarily the crux of salt gatherers' concerns. Evidence would suggest that the reason why salt gatherers found this Act so threatening was not because of an incorporation into the Bahamian Assembly per se; it was because of the consequences that would arise from that representation: taxation. Resisting this constitutional change was critical to avoiding further duties and taxes on imported and exported goods. This was a fight that had raged for over a century, periodically causing disturbances whenever the salt gatherers detected a whiff of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The National Archives, Letter from (acting) King's Agent Zachariah Hood to Secretary of State Lord Hawkesbury, 10 January 1789, CO 23/30 f. 57.

Bahamian taxation. Yet, the urgency of their concerns in 1802 was as never before. They were battling against the Representation Act of 1799 that had already won the Royal Assent in London – their arguments were therefore working retrospectively against the clock. The threat of a tax law on salt and other sundry goods was immediate as the Act of 1802 had already been approved in the Bahamian Assembly and a Receiver General had been sent down to Turks Islands to begin its collection. Bermudian salt gatherers understood that if the Representation Act of 1799 remained in place, this subsequent taxation would be difficult to resist.

As such, the final attack against the preamble of the Representation Act was economic, aimed at the ‘contributions’ Turks Islanders had historically made to the Bahamas Government. The authors of the Address found this suggestion incredulous:

It was, and is notorious to the Legislature of New Providence, and to all descriptions of persons who ever had any Knowledge of either place, that the Salt Rakers at Turks Islands, never did contribute in any wise to the support of the Government of New Providence, but on the contrary, have always resisted every Tax and Contribution attempted to be imposed or levied on them by the Legislature of New Providence, and in this Resistance we are happy to remark, that they have been countenanced by His Majesty.<sup>38</sup>

Much of the reason for their resistance was the burden of double taxation. As migratory and maritime sojourners to Turks Islands, the salt gatherers were residents of Bermuda where their families resided and where they paid due contributions to its Government. Moreover, with the passage of the Tonnage Act in 1788, which placed a tax of two shillings and six pence per ton on American vessels, there was a further financial hit.<sup>39</sup> Though American vessels laden with

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<sup>38</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, ‘A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices’, 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

<sup>39</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, ‘Appendix F of A

salt were meant to pay this duty, in reality the salt gatherers assumed the burden by lowering the price of their salt in order to remain competitive in the Caribbean market place. In effect, the duty on tonnage became a tax on the salt gatherers.<sup>40</sup> When combined with the expense of maintaining enslaved labourers, importing provisions and contributing towards the defence of the islands, the white Bermudians resorting to Turks Islands were making only moderate profits. Appendices G, H, K, and I go to lengths to prove this. They include depositions taken from Bermudian salt gatherers, asking them questions about the quantity, sale price and shipping costs of salt for the preceding twelve years, as well as the expense of maintaining enslaved labourers and their annual contributions towards the islands' public services. This information, collated and averaged, resulted in a net income of five pound sterling, fifteen shillings and two pence per share in the ponds compared to a gross income of twenty-one pound sterling, eighteen shillings and eight pence per share.<sup>41</sup> The Bermudian interest argued that if further taxes were introduced on top, the benefits of the salt industry would not outweigh the costs. This would lead to the 'distress and ruin of Your Majesty's Bermuda Subjects' and to the abandonment of Turks Islands; a place the salt gatherers and their enslaved labourers had 'brought to perfection' and formed 83 per cent of its migratory and maritime population.<sup>42</sup>

Through these economic, demographic and environmental factors, the Bermudian interest deplored the inexpediency of including Turks Islands within the Bahamas' jurisdiction by specifically attacking the preamble of the Representation Act. By pointing to its glaring dissonances with the actual

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Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands', 24 November 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 85-87.

<sup>40</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>41</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'Appendix G of A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands', 21 December 1801, CO 37/52 ff. 87-88.

<sup>42</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King', 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 f. 78. The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 13.



circumstances present on Turks Islands, they showed how alienated Turks Islanders felt from Bahamian affairs.

Outside of the preamble's exact wording, however, there was a wider constitutional issue. By 1802, Turks Islands were not lawless, with only tentative oversight from Bermuda. Following a French attack on Turks Islands in 1764, it had an official appointed on the spot under the new title of the Turks Islands King's Agent (see Chapter 7). This officer received instructions from the Secretary of State, rather than the Governor of the Bahamas, and he was appointed directly by the Crown. His commission stipulated that he would be granted,

...full Power and Authority, by all lawful Ways and Means, to Aid, Assist, and Protect all our Subjects and People, that now are or from time to time shall be settled there, and also our merchants and other Subjects trading or that shall trade in our said Islands, or within any part thereof, and also all and every their Goods and Merchandises there, and their Ships, Vessels and Trade aforesaid.<sup>43</sup>

Such a commission, 'so new and unusual in nature', was surprisingly expansive and open-ended.<sup>44</sup> It gave the King's Agent significant latitude in the two main areas that were of concern to the British Government in regards to Turks Islands: commerce and defence. Its description of those the King's Agent should 'Aid, Assist and Protect' was telling: these were British subjects 'that now are or *from time to time* shall be settled there' as well as the merchants who plied the trade.<sup>45</sup> This was recognition from London of the unusual settlement patterns and sinew populations at Turks Islands that involved a significant number of transient, maritime and migratory salt gatherers. To be sure, the King's Agent was tacitly accountable to the Bahamian Governor with a seat on his Council. Moreover, powers to legislate Acts and form a civil government were not specified in the commission. But that commission did not explicitly state this subordination

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<sup>43</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 'Appendix A: The Commission of the King's Agent to Alexander Murray', 28 July 1789, BT 6/74.

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas, 4 August 1769, BT 6/74.

<sup>45</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 'Appendix A: The Commission of the King's Agent to Alexander Murray', 28 July 1789, BT 6/74. Italics added for emphasis.

within its text, nor did it stop the first King's Agent from promoting distinctive legislation for Turks Islands when he gained direct access to the Secretary of State and secured the Royal Regulations of 1781.

These Royal Regulations were for the good government and preservation of the peace at Turks Islands. While Chapter 5 will explore them in detail, it is relevant to state that they were intended to attune carefully to the particular circumstances at Turks Islands, which the Bahamas Government could not account for, and authority was given to the King's Agent to implement them. Over time, these regulations also encouraged a feeling of independence amongst the salt gatherers. The supplement to the Address of 1802 states,

It may be asked by the Legislature of New Providence, whether the Salt rakers wish to be under no Government whatever at Turks Islands. – Our answer is, that so far from there being no Government, it is with pleasure we contemplate, that they are controuled by the best of Governments – that is to say, by the wise and salutary regulations of His Majesty in Council, approved in 1781. Regulations divested of legal Subtleties, calculated to meet the understanding of a plain illiterate people.<sup>46</sup>

From 1781, the Bahamas Government was not allowed to pass colonial laws obstructing the salt gatherers at Turks Islands unless granted the Royal Assent. Turks Islands were deemed a part of his Majesty's Royal Bounty and their salt ponds were free to all British subjects. Like mines and fisheries, the salt ponds were reserved for His Majesty's pleasure. Land grants on Turks Islands were prohibited while the revenue that was collected from the Tonnage Act went straight to London.

In such unusual circumstances, it is no wonder that a cavity in the imperial system cracked open; that such prolific debate over the right to legislate for, and tax within, Turks Islands existed. Turks Islands seemed to exist somewhere between a Crown appendage in and of itself and islands within a larger archipelagic colony. By picking at that cavity, and shaping it into a crevasse, salt gatherers hoped to persuade London that these islands existed at a

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<sup>46</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices', 9 July 1802, CO 37/52 ff. 78-91.

unique imperial interstice, meriting their continued attention and protection; that the socioeconomic ties which bound them to Bermuda were strong and enduring; and that Turks Islands were not a part of the Bahamas, and never had been.

### **London's intervention**

This Address went straight to the heart of the British Government, landing on the desk of the Secretary of State. The British Government's response demonstrated that London did care about this issue and understood the need for resolution, but arriving at that resolution would prove a difficult process. The Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations marshalled a huge amount of information and knowledge about the salt industry at Turks Islands, in which multiple and oft-competing interests were consulted. Even so, the case was referred to the highest source of legal authority in Britain – the Attorney and Solicitor General – demonstrating the sensitive and intricate nature of the issue at hand.

#### *The Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations*

The Address of 1802 was not an isolated document. It formed part of a collection. With the receipt of news describing the discontent of the salt gatherers at Turks Islands, this bundle of documents was collected by His Majesty's Council and sent to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations. Contributors from all sides of the debate were encouraged to send in their evidence and claims. The collection included a variety of papers comprising correspondence from the Governors of the Bahamas and Bermuda; memorials from the King's Agent and the Bahamian and Bermudian Colonial Agents; the original commissions of the Bahamas Governor and the King's Agent; letters of correspondence between different ministers; the Acts of the Bahamian Assembly under scrutiny; and a series of historic state papers that went as far back as 1715 respecting His Majesty's original claims to the Bahamas and Turks Islands. This amassing of both external and internal documentation reflected London's determination to decide upon this issue once and for all. As Heerma van Voss has argued, there is often a deferential style in the writing of memorials to assure

those in authority that the petitioners did not intend ‘to question the established power structure’.<sup>47</sup> Yet, ‘behind the deferential face of a petition always lurked the threat that the population might revolt if a justified demand went unheeded’.<sup>48</sup> Given the rebellious character of both Bermudian and Bahamian subjects, it was important London demonstrated to these colonists that it would treat this case fairly with due gravity and concern. A hearing was demanded and took place on 19 January 1803.

However, by paying attention to the array of documents, it becomes clear this was not only a dispute between Bermudian salt rakers and the Bahamas Government. It had severely ruffled the feathers of the King’s Agent as well. Alexander Murray was the third King’s Agent of Turks Islands, after Andrew Symmer and Zachariah Hood. He had received his commission in 1789, and consequently had been resident in Turks Islands for almost thirteen years by the time of the hearing in 1803. His father, John Murray, the 4th Earl of Dunmore, had been Governor of the Bahamas from 1786 to 1796. Governor Dunmore left that position in disgrace, recalled for consistent overspending, corrupt government practices and civil disobedience but not before he had manoeuvred his son to be Turks Islands’ King’s Agent.

In February 1802, Murray was presented with a memorial from the salt gatherers on Turks Islands, requesting him to represent their grievances to the King.<sup>49</sup> This memorial was signed by seventy-five of the prominent salt gatherers whose reasons for resisting taxation and annexation were by this point well known. They included the years spent toiling the pans in order to support their families in Bermuda, the unfavourable climate precluding permanent habitation, the unreliable salt harvests which often meant expenditures exceeded profits, and the fact that previous attempts to extend Bahamian laws to Turks Islands had proven unsuccessful. In this present situation, they entreated Murray to represent their case once more and he acceded to their request. In November 1802 and again in January 1803, Murray presented memorials to the Committee of the

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<sup>47</sup> Heerma van Voss, *Petitions in Social History*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the salt gatherers to the Turks Islands King’s Agent Alexander Murray, 8 February 1802, BT 6/74.

Privy Council for Trade and Plantations.<sup>50</sup> The salt gatherers not only had the Bermudian legislature backing their cause, but the King's Agent as well.

Within these memorials, Murray was sympathetic to the objection of the Bermudian salt gatherers to Bahamian interference. Yet, Murray pushed their argument further. He believed that rather than being underneath Bahamian or Bermudian jurisdictions, Turks Islands were constitutionally a separate appendage of the British Crown, a direct possession of His Majesty.<sup>51</sup> To support this, he pointed towards his commission and instructions to uphold the 1781 Royal Regulations of the ponds. He reiterated the 'peculiar circumstances' of Turks Islands that precluded any easy communication with Nassau. Located over 500 miles away and in the path of trade winds, it was extremely difficult for Nassau to govern or even materially assist these most out of 'Out Islands'. As a result, there could be little material benefit for the salt gatherers in receiving representation at Nassau. Provisions were often so scarce in Nassau that their supply had to be sourced from elsewhere – often Bermuda, sometimes the United States. Could these islands be served practically within the Bahamas Government? Murray believed they could not, and constitutionally he believed they were never intended to be.

Murray strongly conceived these salt islands were at 'the sole disposal of the Crown'.<sup>52</sup> Like mines and mineral-rich areas, no lands had been sequestered on Turks Islands. All remained in the hands of the Crown, for an Act of Parliament stipulated that 'when Governors are empowered to grant Lands they are not permitted to deed any within a 100 yards of a Salt Pond, that Proportion with the Pond being reserved for His Majesty'.<sup>53</sup> The salt gatherers, mostly transient migrants from another colony, could therefore never be termed 'freeholders' as the preamble of the Act of 1799 suggested. Even more convincing was the operation of the Tonnage Act. The revenue collected from the tonnage duty was remitted directly from Turks Islands to the Receiver

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<sup>50</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray relative to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 6 November 1802, BT 6/74. The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

General of Customs in England to be paid by him to the Exchequer. Yet the Act of the 18th George III Chapter 12 made it clear,

That the King and Parliament of Great Britain will not impose any Duty, Tax or assessment, whether payable in any of his Majesty's Colonies...except only such Duties as it may be expedient to impose for the regulation of Commerce, the net produce of such duties to be always applied to the use of the Colony or Province, or plantations, in which the same shall be levied, in such manner as other duties collected by the Authority of the General Courts or General Assemblies of such Colonies are ordinarily paid.<sup>54</sup>

According to this law, Murray pointed out, if Turks Islands were a part of Bahamian jurisdiction, the revenues collected from the tonnage duty should have been for the use of the Bahamas. Yet the duties collected by the Tonnage Act were remitted directly to London. Moreover, as those revenues were submitted to the Exchequer under 'the Head of Consolidated Customs' it made those duties appear as 'part of the British, and not Colonial, revenue of Parliament'.<sup>55</sup> Murray reasoned that if this argument was followed to its conclusion, and Turks Islands really were underneath Bahamian jurisdiction, then Parliament was violating its own Act in recouping these duties.

However, if Turks Islands were understood as a separate appendage under the direct protection of the Crown, these laws remained unbroken. For Murray, this was the case in point, and maintaining this constitutional position was crucial, not just for preserving his own position but also for increasing the revenue of the Crown. This revenue had experienced a ten-fold increase under his protection, from 1790 to 1801.<sup>56</sup> Murray argued that it could be improved further still, if the current system of government was allowed to mature. He thus urged the Privy Council to withhold assent to the tax law under scrutiny; to pass a bill which would prevent future Bahamian tax laws applying to Turks Islands; and to include clauses within it that not only permitted the establishment of inferior courts of justice and a committee of regulators on Turks Islands but also

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> The National Archives, Letter from the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Commissioners of the King's Treasury, 24 December 1802, BT 6/74.

demarcated the limits of Bahamian jurisdiction.<sup>57</sup> In this diplomatic maelstrom, Murray was seeking further devolution for Turks Islands, perhaps even a greater role for himself.

These aspirations echoed those of Andrew Symmer, the first King's Agent, who was criticised by the Bahamas Governor for abusing the boundaries of his authority.<sup>58</sup> Symmer wished to make Turks Islands a free port, with a self-governing system and its own tax laws. Although Symmer was asked to temper his designs by the Secretary of State, his proposed regulations did become the basis of the 1781 Royal Regulations for the salt ponds. The commission of King's Agent therefore did leave significant room for manoeuvre, to the point where Murray, like Symmer, began to question why Turks Islands should fall under Bahamian or Bermudian jurisdiction at all, when 'by the progress of Trade and Population it might be expedient for the general Interest to form a new Colony'.<sup>59</sup> This desire to set Turks Islands apart was picked up in a letter from the Speaker of the Bahamas Assembly to its Colonial Agent, George Chalmers, informing him of 'the late Attempts of the Turks Island Ambassador and his Bermudian Friends, who without Doubt had an idea of forming themselves and their Constitutions into a *Sovereign Republic*'.<sup>60</sup> While laced with disdain, such comments indicate how, in this vociferous debate, Murray's was another voice pushing for the 'peculiar circumstances' at Turks Islands to be upheld.

In defending the independence of Turks Islands, Murray had to fend off severe Bahamian criticism that aimed to undercut his credibility. Amongst the collated papers were allegations from the Bahamas Governor, John Halkett,

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<sup>57</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>58</sup> For information on Governor Thomas Shirley of the Bahamas's report on King's Agent Andrew Symmer's illicit trading activities, see Cynthia Kennedy, 'The Other White Gold: Salt, Slaves, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Colonialism', *The Historian*, Vol. 69 No. 2 (May, 2007), pp. 226-228.

<sup>59</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>60</sup> The National Archives, Extract of a letter from the Speaker of the Bahamian Assembly Mr Webster to the Colonial Agent of the Bahamas George Chalmers, 25 October 1802, BT 6/74.

accusing Murray of knowingly fermenting an illicit trade at Turks Islands.<sup>61</sup> This trade involved allowing American vessels laden with provisions to enter at Turks Islands. While illegal by the strict letter of the law, which reserved the supply of provisions to British vessels only, Murray confessed he had but little choice when the inhabitants were facing famine and threatening to abandon the ponds.<sup>62</sup> With the future of the salt trade vulnerable, and the Crown's revenue in jeopardy, Murray decided to temporarily depart from the law in order to import much needed supplies. Murray reflected, 'I appeal to your Honourable Board whether by any construction of language this can be strained into a charge of Illicit Trade sanctioned by our Officers'?<sup>63</sup> Yet Governor Halkett's criticism extended to what he perceived to be the flagrant disobedience of Murray and his officers in hindering the rightful collection of salt duties. Writing in September 1802, Governor Halkett condemned the magistrates and officers there for allowing 'upwards of Twenty vessels' to load and leave with salt 'without paying one farthing of Colonial Revenue' and by refusing to assist the Bahamian Receiver General in his duties.<sup>64</sup> Accusations of governmental corruption were levied at the Deputy Collector of the Customs, Deputy King's Agent, Deputy Commander of Turks Islands, and of course, the King's Agent himself. Murray's position was called 'useless', Governor Halkett not being 'able to discover the smallest use of such an Establishment at Turks Islands, though I have enquired much into the subject'.<sup>65</sup> Governor Halkett was adamant that all the fractious and irregular proceedings at Turks Islands arose from the 'secret encouragement' of the King's Agent.<sup>66</sup> He called for its abolition.

Thus affronted, Murray addressed Governor Halkett's attack, which he understood as 'a reflection on myself personally by proposing not only the abolition of the Office of King's Agent but that a respectable and trustworthy

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<sup>61</sup> The National Archives, Extract of a letter from Governor John Halkett of the Bahamas to the Under-Secretary of State John Sullivan, 9 September 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>62</sup> The National Archives, Answer of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to Governor John Halkett of the Bahamas, undated, BT 6/74.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> The National Archives, Extract of a letter from Governor John Halkett of the Bahamas to the Under-Secretary of State John Sullivan, 9 September 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



person should be sent out as Collector of the Customs'.<sup>67</sup> For Murray this was a personal insult against his status and ability to govern. It forced him to remark, acidly,

Possessing hereditary rank at least equal to Mr Halkett and maintaining a respectability in my intercourse with Society in no respect inferior, I feel myself called upon to protect my own honour and assert that no Collector of the Customs (even Mr Halkett himself) could His Majesty's Revenue have been better protected or a greater degree of subordination maintained.<sup>68</sup>

Whether or not Murray acted illicitly, this exchange reveals the pressure he was under to prove his worth as King's Agent.

Murray also faced criticism from another corner: the Colonial Agent for the Bahamas. In his memorial to the Board of Trade in November 1802, Chalmers wrote that 'His Majesty's Agent at Turks Islands...disturbs His Majesty's Government at the Bahama Islands, by acting contrary to his duty as Agent, as one of the King's Council, and as the Collector of the Customs at Turk's islands'.<sup>69</sup> In his opinion, 'much of that resistance by the Inhabitants at Turks Islands to His Majesty's Government at the Bahamas have arisen from the appointment of the King's Agent there'.<sup>70</sup> Because of this, Chalmers believed it necessary to examine again the reasons why the position of King's Agent was created. He pointed to the fact the role was enacted in 1766 after a French attack on Turks Islands in 1764. Following this invasion, and the eventual recapture of Turks Islands, it was agreed a British officer should be there 'on the spot' to defend and protect the inhabitants of these most valuable of Out Islands.<sup>71</sup> Symmer was appointed, but 'when the Board of Trade were directed to draw up His Instructions, they said, in answer, that they had in their Books no Precedent

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<sup>67</sup> The National Archives, Answer of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to Governor Halkett of the Bahamas, undated, BT 6/74.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The National Archives, Petition of the Bahamas' Colonial Agent George Chalmers to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 12 November 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 7 for an in-depth analysis of the French attack of 1764 and its consequences for Turks Islands' governance.

for such an Officer; and that his commission must be his Guide'.<sup>72</sup> This position was innovative and novel. To Chalmers, the result was an uncomfortable ambiguity around the powers of the King's Agent, which over time unintentionally presented a challenge to the Bahamian Governor's authority and constitutional confusion for ministers in London. He lamented, 'this Agency has done much Mischief, and no good: for it has assumed an independency on the Bahama Government, and has promoted incidentally refractoriness in the Inhabitants'.<sup>73</sup> Like Governor Halkett, Chalmers called for the position to be suspended.

From the Bahamian legislature's perspective, Turks Islands were and always had been a part of the Bahamas. As a result, it viewed the resistance of the Bermudian salt gatherers to the Representation Act of 1799 and Taxation Act of 1802 as that of disobedient subjects whose rebellious tendencies had been encouraged by a King's Agent overstepping his mark. It believed that the evidence placing Turks Islands within Bahamian jurisdiction was irrefutable and any exemption granted to Turks Islands from Bahamian colonial laws would strike at the heart of its sovereign powers. Colonial Agent Chalmers and Governor Halkett warned this would set a dangerous precedent, especially at a moment when moves were underway to develop the other salt ponds of the Bahamas. A memorial of the Bahamas legislature underscored these ambitions by estimating that a potential annual yield of three million bushels of salt could be extracted from the Bahamas, excluding Turks Islands, if His Majesty offered his assistance.<sup>74</sup> This venture could only be profitable if the privilege that allowed foreign vessels to enter Turks Islands in ballast was extended to the other islands in the Bahamas and if Turks Islands were not exempt from colonial tax laws. Otherwise, 'this will be holding forth encouragement among us to disunion or disobedience to the Provincial Laws, and will afford future ground for objections, delays and discontent among the distant but improving Islands of

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<sup>72</sup> The National Archives, Petition of the Bahamas' Colonial Agent George Chalmers to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 12 November 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> The National Archives, Petition of the Council and Assembly of the Bahamas to the King, 24 December 1802, BT 6/74.

this Colony'.<sup>75</sup> Like any other Bahamian subject, the salt gatherer at Turks Islands should have to contribute to the government of which he was part – regardless of the demographic, geographical and economic pleas of the Bermuda Government. As a general colonial law, the salt gatherers had no legal right to disobey. It was a simple and compelling argument.

*The final report of the Attorney and Solicitor General*

This protracted debate, then, involved three colonial government groups: the Bermuda Government, the Turks Islands King's Agent, and the Bahamas Government. All three urged that a final decision on the topic be made. The complexity of the issues caused a protracted and extensive investigation by the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations. On 19 January 1803 a hearing took place before the committee, with a cross-examination of the Bahamas Counsel and Murray.<sup>76</sup> Following this hearing, further information was collected from the state paper archives, calculations were made of the burdens a salt tax would actually impose, and an investigation into Murray's conduct was authorised. In the end, London's Customs House excused Murray's decision to permit an illicit trade and thought it 'right to observe that no other complaint against the conduct of Mr Murray is pending before this Board and that the revenue received...from the Turks Islands has of late been very considerable'.<sup>77</sup> But the urgent need for an indisputable legal answer remained and the case was referred to the King's Attorney and Solicitor General.

The Attorney and Solicitor General's office contained the chief law officers of the Crown, representing His Majesty in legal matters, as well as offering advice to the Government. The fact their expertise was called upon to settle this debate over Turks Islands' jurisdiction demonstrates both the gravity and ambiguity of this case. Upon receiving all the papers collected by the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, the Attorney and

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<sup>75</sup> The National Archives, Extract of a letter from Governor Halkett of the Bahamas to the Under-Secretary of State John Sullivan, 14 December 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>76</sup> The National Archives, Answer of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Remarks of the Bahamas Counsel, 19 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>77</sup> The National Archives, Custom House Officer to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 15 January 1803, BT 6/74.

Solicitor General were asked to consider carefully ‘whether upon the true Constitution of His Majesty’s Commission to the Governor of the Bahama Islands, the Legislative Authority of the Bahama Islands extends over the Islands called Turks Islands’.<sup>78</sup> Their decision upon this issue would be final.

In the officers’ closing report, they made it clear it was not their place to judge the prudence of whether Turks Islands should properly be under Bahamian jurisdiction, but only whether legally it had been considered so. In stating this, the law officers were making it known that many of the socioeconomic, demographic and cultural arguments of the Bermuda Government and the salt gatherers would be put to one side as they considered in purely legal terms the extent of Bahamian jurisdiction.

The report made two concluding points. First, it looked into the commissions of the Bahamas Governor and Assembly to decipher if their jurisdictions were in fact the same. Having attended to each commission’s precise wordings, the Attorney and Solicitor General believed it ‘to be quite clear that the true Construction of the Commission requires the same limits to be given to the Jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly of the Bahamas as to the Executive Authority of the Governor’.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, if Turks Islands *were* a part of the Bahamas, it was irrefutable that the Assembly was legally permitted to legislate for them. In that case, the Acts of 1799 and 1802 were valid. All of the Bahamas’ islands fell within the jurisdiction of the Assembly and the Governor – there were no exceptions and no islands that enjoyed special jurisdictional arrangements.

The report then had to qualify *if* Turks Islands were a part of the Bahamas. In the opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor General, ‘There can be no doubt we suppose that His Majesty might comprehend them within such Government and therefore it is only to be seen whether he intended to do so and has used apt words to execute such intention’.<sup>80</sup> In the law officers’ assessment, the intention of the King was important: how he understood where Turks Islands sat within his realm would decide the matter. Passing a judgement on this would

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<sup>78</sup> The National Archives, Report of the King’s Attorney and Solicitor General to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 4 June 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

depend largely on what historic legal advice had been given to the King to shape his opinion on this issue. Two reports of the Board of Trade to the King, from 1764 and 1768, were duly and carefully deliberated.

The first report was written after a French attack on Turks Islands in 1764 and sought to advise the King on his rights to Turks Islands in order to invalidate French claims. The report described the long-standing possession of the Bahamas by the British since the 1670s. It pointed to the original proprietor grants of the Bahamas to the Duke of Albermarle and others ‘by Letter patent from King Charles the Second’ in 1670, the subsequent decision to place the Bahamas under Crown rule in 1717, and a number of international treaties that had since confirmed the Bahamas were British possessions.<sup>81</sup> The report firmly stated the Bahamas were indisputably British and not French or Spanish.

The report then established that Turks Islands were ‘unquestionably a part of the Lucayos’ by referencing the works of two geographical writers who described the Bahamas ‘to comprehend all Islands between the Island of Bahama in the North and the Island of Inagua in the South’.<sup>82</sup> As Turks Islands were north of Inagua, the Board of Trade argued they had to be considered part of the Bahamas. The original letters patent by King Charles similarly reinforced this, stating the Bahamas were to include:

All those Islands called Bahama, Eleuthera, Ucarnes, Providence, Inagua and all other those Islands lying in the Degree of Twenty and Two to Twenty and Seven North Latitude, commonly known by the name of the Bahama Islands or the islands of the Lucayos.<sup>83</sup>

Although these lines of latitude actually excluded Turks Islands – something the salt gatherers were always keen to point out – in 1764 the Board of Trade reasoned ‘yet it can by no means be inferred from thence that they are not included in the grant, in as much as they are situated to the North of the Island of Inagua’.<sup>84</sup> That Inagua was expressly mentioned was enough to convince the Board of Trade that this island was where ‘the Southern limits of the Lucayos

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<sup>81</sup> The National Archives, Report of the Board of Trade respecting the King’s right to Turks Islands, 1764, BT 6/74.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

must have been intended to extend'.<sup>85</sup> With Turks Islands lying north of Inagua and at significant risk of being taken by France, the Board of Trade strongly concluded: that Turks Islands were a part of the Bahamas, that the Bahamas were a long-held British possession, and that France therefore had no right to them.

The second report of the Board of Trade in 1768 returned to these issues when the Bahamas Governor accused the King's Agent of abusing his powers and infringing on his jurisdiction over Turks Islands. To establish if this was so, the Board of Trade first referenced its previous report of 1764 to confirm Turks Islands were a part of Bahamian jurisdiction. It then referred to a memorial that Governor Thomas Shirley had made shortly afterwards in which he expressed the need to improve Turks Islands' security and trade by 'having some Person there to superintend the Commerce'.<sup>86</sup> The Board of Trade reasoned this 'being the origin and nature of Mr Symmer's Appointment' as King's Agent, his attempts to form 'a Constitution of Civil Government' at Turks Islands in 1768 were 'illegal and unwarrantable and derogatory of, and inconsistent with, the Power and Authorities contained in your Majesty's Commission under the Great Seal of Your Governor of the Bahama Islands'.<sup>87</sup> The 1768 report chastised the King's Agent for overstepping his mark and reaffirmed he was legally subordinate to the Bahamas Governor.

These Board of Trade reports of 1764 and 1768 were those that primarily informed the legal opinion of the Attorney and Solicitor General in 1803. The law officers reflected, 'We think it is not Necessary to go beyond the information contained in the two reports of the Board of Trade in 1764 and 1768 to settle this Question [of Turks Islands' jurisdiction]'.<sup>88</sup> They placed heavy emphasis on how, during the 1760s, the Board of Trade had constitutionally situated Turks Islands within the Bahamas in order to secure its title against foreign incursions and therefore safeguard the overall integrity of the British Empire. The law officers stated, 'from them, it appears that at that time one of the main grounds on which His Majesty's Right to the Turks Islands was asserted was that they

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> The National Archives, Report of the Board of Trade respecting the King's right to Turks Islands, 4 May 1768, BT 6/74.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> The National Archives, Report of the King's Attorney and Solicitor General to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 4 June 1803, BT 6/74.

were a part of the Bahama Islands'.<sup>89</sup> As a result, the Attorney and Solicitor General reasoned it was inconceivable that, from 1768 onwards, the King had not understood Turks Islands as part of the Bahamas. It was *the* grounds for his continued possession of them and the arsenal he used to fend off French and Spanish claims. As such, it must have been his intention that subsequent commissions to the Bahamas' Governor and Assembly included Turks Islands within their jurisdiction, even if it was not explicitly stated and despite the ensuing confusion these absences caused. In this thought process, the socioeconomic, demographic and cultural arguments of the Bermudian salt gatherers were secondary to the legal and constitutional arguments that had secured British sovereignty over these saline spaces in the international arena. The latter would take precedence. On 4 June 1803, the Attorney and Solicitor General delivered their verdict: 'we have concluded that the Turks Islands are within the jurisdiction of the Legislature of the Bahamas...[T]he Legislative Authority of the Bahamas Islands extends over the islands called Turks Islands'.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

With London's decision to uphold the Bahamian Acts of Assembly, Turks Islands finally and formally came under Bahamian jurisdiction. After a protracted diplomatic feud that had lasted over a century, the issue was politically settled. However, as this chapter has shown, the process that led towards this decision was far from straightforward. By prying apart the multifaceted debate, this chapter has argued that Turks Islands were so hard to 'situate' precisely because they had rested at a political interstice within the imperial governing system. The genuine difficulty of governing a scattered archipelago like the Bahamas and protecting it from the onslaught of foreign attack had led to the creation of a new role within the imperial governing system. Yet the very creation of a King's Agent at Turks Islands, so unprecedented and 'peculiar' in nature, helped foment a sense of 'independency' amongst those residing at the salt islands and reinforced their alienation from Nassau. This,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

alongside the Royal Regulations of 1781, the reservation of all lands to the Crown, and the collection of the tonnage duty for His Majesty's revenue, all helped to complicate issues around Turks Islands' jurisdiction.

Moreover, the 'peculiarity' of Turks Islands pivoted around potent issues of self-identification. The migratory, maritime and transient lifestyles of the salt gatherers tied them culturally, socially, economically and politically with Bermuda, a place where their families lived and to which they annually returned. It is a thread that is revealed in the historical record time and again. Their unique position in the imperial governing system, in having a King's Agent, gave them a sense of privilege and entitlement. It fostered a sense of independence and certainly gave them improved access to those in power in London. However, the force behind their resistance undoubtedly sprung from the strength of their ties with Bermuda. Over the century, this would consistently fuel their opposition to any suspected encroachments on their preferred lifestyles. When the Bahamian Acts of Assembly on representation and taxation were passed at the turn of the century without the salt gatherers' knowledge, the gravity of this new situation generated a huge mobilisation of colonial resources from Bermuda and Turks Islands. Once again the colonies grappled with the question of where Turks Islands' jurisdiction truly lay, but this time the opinions of the Bermuda Government, the King's Agent and the Bahamas Government were so opposing, so polarised, that London was forced to intervene.

The British Government's response demonstrated that London did care about this issue. It certainly sensed the importance of forming a definitive resolution on it, not least because its own role in establishing the position of King's Agent was hardly inconsequential. Yet, its response in 1803 was inevitably reactive. For here was an issue that had grown up organically in the colonies, from the ambiguous lines of sovereignty that had festered within them, and from the years of intra-colonial wrangling that had taken place. London's ministers, an ocean away, struggled to understand the complexity of the issues – calling in experts from different state departments and rifling through old state papers. In the end, the intricacy and confusion mandated the referral of the case to His Majesty's Attorney and Solicitor General for final deliberation. These were the highest law officers of the British Empire. As advisers to the King and British Government, these law officers ruled the issue could only be resolved by



upholding the integrity of the British Empire, citing international agreements that had secured Turks Islands to Britain *purely* on the basis that they were a part of the Bahamas. All other factors were secondary. It was an argument that Bermuda's colonial petitions, as comprehensive as they were, could not refute. As a new century dawned, the porous administrative boundaries of Turks Islands hardened and closed as they slipped from underneath a Bermudian sphere of influence into a period of territorial Bahamian rule. The maritime, migratory and transient lifestyles of the salt gatherers were on borrowed time.

## Chapter 5: ‘Free and Unrestrained’: The Political Economy of Turks Islands

### Introduction

In 1768, the Secretary of State wrote to the Bahamas Governor ordering him to enact specific regulations for Turks Islands. He warned, ‘You should not countenance any regulations which may have the effect to restrain any of His Majesty’s subjects in the prosecution of those branches of commerce, which are in their nature, and by useage, free and unrestrained’.<sup>1</sup> Lord Hillsborough’s description of the salt trade was significant. In one sentence he underscored how the ponds were underpinned by an economic philosophy that had few parallels in the British Caribbean. In Turks Islands, trade in salt was meant to be *free*, and it was meant to be *unrestrained*. At its heart was the idea that every British subject should have unfettered access to the salt industry. This question of access had huge ramifications for the islands’ political economy and their system of land tenure. It would represent a noteworthy departure from the plantation model.

This chapter seeks to address the nature of this departure. It will argue that at a time when a drift towards privatisation throughout the British Atlantic world might have been expected, the saltpans tended towards collective ownership. This collectivistic enterprise was in part an Atlantic transfer of the early-modern English notion of ‘the commons’. However, it also owed its character to the islands’ historical development and the nature of salt production. Together, the blending of Atlantic and local evolution created a new sort of political economy. It was called the Head Rights System and it operated like a ‘creole commons’: neither completely of the Old World nor entirely of the New but a hybrid; an economic system that complemented the specific challenges posed by eighteenth-century salt.

To pursue this argument, this chapter will approach the Head Rights System in three different ways. First, it will analyse the distinctive features of the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Letter from Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas’, 20 July 1768, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 6. Italics added for emphasis.

Head Rights System through regulations that were implemented between 1767 and 1781. Second, it will compare and contrast the Head Rights System to the sugar plantation model. And third, it will scrutinise the extent to which the Head Rights System should be considered an Atlantic transfer to, or creative hybrid within, the Caribbean.

### **Features of the Head Rights System**

In 1766, following a French attack on Turks Islands, Andrew Symmer became the first Turks Islands King's Agent with instructions to encourage settlement and deter foreign invasions (see Chapter 7). For the first time, the salt gatherers would benefit from the protection of the Crown. This made the salt trade a more attractive economic endeavour but it also meant the ad-hoc system of resorting to Turks Islands would come under scrutiny. In February 1767, Symmer wrote to the Secretary of State, 'these Islands have been for some time by past, in a Maroon State, there has been neither Regulations nor Property maintained'.<sup>2</sup> In May, he wrote again, 'If the free and Licentious Life, which the Settlers on these Islands for Sixty Years by past, be considered, it will serve as a Vindication for such part of the Regulations as may seem severe'.<sup>3</sup> Symmer was adamant that the 'Custom for many years by past' of 'Numbers of people' arriving at Turks Islands and 'under pretext of becoming Settlers' taking 'Shares in the Ponds' would have to be stopped.<sup>4</sup> From early in his tenure, Symmer intended to tie the salt gatherers to the islands more permanently, and publish regulations to encourage order and prosperity.

One of his first actions was to assemble a board of eight elected members and publish a series of local regulations on the islands in 1767.<sup>5</sup> While Symmer was accused of abusing his powers, officials in high circles took note and

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<sup>2</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King's Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Shelburne, 27 February 1767, CO 23/16/205.

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King's Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State, 26 May 1767, CO 23/16/231.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, Copy of an Act made by the General Board of Turks Islands, 1767, CO 23/7/279.

<sup>5</sup> The National Archives, Heads of Rules and Orders for regulating his Majesty's Ponds on Turks Islands and for maintaining Peace and Good Order among the Inhabitants, 16 March 1767, CO 23/16/211.

recognised the need to codify a set of regulations for Turks Islands' 'peculiar circumstances'.<sup>6</sup> In 1773, the Secretary of State directed the Bahamian Governor to legislate. From the start, Lord Hillsborough was clear these regulations should not be a re-enactment of Bahamian laws on Turks Island soil. For example, he reprimanded the Bahamian Governor for 'referring this Gentlemen [Symmer] to the laws of the Bahama Islands, as a Guide to his Judgement in respect to Turks Islands, to which those laws were never meant to apply'.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the regulations should be tailored specifically to the needs and trade of the Turks Island community. Significant pressure was placed on Governor Shirley to act in collaboration with Symmer, and the outcome of these cross-Atlantic conversations was a set of official regulations passed by the Bahamian Governor, Council and Assembly in 1774 entitled, 'An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands'.<sup>8</sup> With it, the Head Rights System was properly enacted with distinctive features of access, equitable shares and collective management.

#### *A common right of access*

The main difference between the unofficial regulations of 1767 and the official regulations of 1774 revolved around access. In 1774, every British subject had a right to rake salt at Turks Islands, provided they agreed to the regulations and maintained the peace. This was not the case in the unofficial regulations of 1767 when Symmer initially tried to restrict access to those who had chosen to live at Turks Islands for at least three years. However, after facing opposition, not least from the Secretary of State, clauses that obstructed the customary practice of annual migrations were dropped. The importance of open access as a guiding principle was highlighted by the fact it was enshrined in the first regulation of both the 1774 and later 1781 series. It proclaimed, 'All His Majesty's Subjects

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<sup>6</sup> The National Archives, Letter from the Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas, 4 August 1769, BT 6/74.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The National Archives, An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands, and for suspending an Act passed in the Eleventh Year of His Majesty's Reign, initiated, an Act for imposing Fines and Penalties on Persons offending against the Regulations made or to be made for the Government of the Salt Ponds within these Islands, 7 February 1774, BT 6/74.

whatsoever shall have free liberty of raking and gathering Salt at the Turks Islands'.<sup>9</sup> To uphold this liberty, land on Turks Islands was not freehold but reserved for the Crown. As late as 1803, the King's Agent was still reaffirming in London that Turks Islands 'continue at this day at the sole disposal of the Crown, not a foot of Land having been alienated by the King...Salt Ponds being held of the Nature of Mines and Minerals'.<sup>10</sup> In further elaboration he stated, 'when Governors are empowered to grant Lands they are not permitted to deed any within a 100 yards of a Salt Pond, that proportion with the Pond being reserved for his Majesty'.<sup>11</sup> In truth, the salt gatherers did not possess ownership of the ponds in a strict legal sense. Rather, they were given the right to access the industry. J M Neeson has said of the early-modern English commons, 'the soil itself, the land, was not the commoner's, but the use of it was'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the saltpans were not the salt gatherer's, but the use of them were. This was the first distinctive feature of the Head Rights System: the Crown reserved the land, and every British subject had a right to access the industry.

#### *An annual and equitable apportioning of shares*

The ponds were then annually divided into shares on an equitable basis, which could not be directly linked to capital. How many shares a salt gatherer received was equal to the size of his company. This explains why it was named the 'Head Rights System' – rights according to the number of physical bodies. A company would consist of the free salt gatherer alongside his enslaved salt rakers or servants. Apportioning shares in this fashion would theoretically ensure the ponds were worked with the greatest efficiency, as a salt gatherer could not buy shares but had to show, physically, he could work the ponds with an appropriate number of hands. This demonstration of strength took place each year on the tenth of February, at the beginning of the salt season and before the official division of the ponds. At that time, the salt gatherers would present themselves,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> J M Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 1.

with their complete company, in order to qualify for shares that season.

Regulation 6 makes it clear,

All persons intending to work in the...Ponds and Pans...shall, every year, on the tenth of February, or at the time of the general Division of the Ponds and Pans, appear with their Companies before the Commissioners then elected; and every Person who shall not appear as aforesaid, shall be excluded from any share in the said Ponds and Pans.<sup>13</sup>

Thereafter, a salt gatherer could not augment his company further in the hope of gaining more shares, as 'no Person shall be allowed any share for any Servant or Slave, who shall not be shewn to the Commissioners at the time of their regulating or proportioning the Shares'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the salt gatherer had to choose which key he intended to work, either Grand Turk or Salt Key, and there remain for the duration of the season. The nature of these shares was therefore unusual. They were renewed annually; they were divided proportionally; and they could only be obtained for either Grand Turk or Salt Key, not both.

Thus, by 1774, Turks Islands had a curious, mixed system of land tenure. At the start of each year, the ponds were 'open access': any British subject could come and declare their stake in the salt industry. Following the tenth of February, this open access became group or collective, meaning only those present could obtain a share of the ponds that season. After the allocation of shares, land tenure shifted one last time, and ownership became something more like private property (but not its kin). Each company had the sole right to rake salt within their given shares, and 'salt marks' were erected to delineate those shares from each other. At the same time, there were general ponds worked in common and each company contributed towards them. Such a mixed tenure system was highly reminiscent of the open-field system in medieval and early-modern England where land tenures varied across time and space according to the agricultural needs of the commoners.<sup>15</sup> In an open-field village, there was often a nucleated

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<sup>13</sup> The National Archives, An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands, and for suspending an Act passed in the Eleventh Year of His Majesty's Reign, initiated, an Act for imposing Fines and Penalties on Persons offending against the Regulations made or to be made for the Government of the Salt Ponds within these Islands, 7 February 1774, BT 6/74.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For a description of an early-modern English commons, see Joan Thirsk, 'The Common Fields', *Past & Present*, No. 29 (Dec., 1964), pp. 3-25.

village surrounded by three open fields divided into strips organised on a crop rotation. During the crop season, commoners had the sole use and benefit of the crops harvested within their strips. Outside of crop season, these fields were thrown open and the commoners' livestock was allowed to roam across. This was in addition to fields of pasture, woodland and waste held in common throughout the year. A traditional English commons thus had a mixed tenure system in which sections transitioned between collective and private property depending on the season. The saltpan operated in a similar fashion through the annual, equitable apportioning of shares in the private ponds and the existence of general ponds held in common throughout the year.

### *A form of collective management*

A third distinctive feature of the Head Rights System was how it was overseen. Officials monitored the salt gatherers' activities to an unprecedented degree. The responsibility for enforcing the regulations lay in the hands of elected commissioners, posts that were filled for one year for the duration of one salt season. In effect, these commissioners became an advisory board or council to the appointed King's Agent and together they regulated the ponds. On the first of February each year, five commissioners were elected for Grand Turk from amongst the inhabitants 'to regulate and proportion the Shares of all persons who shall be entitled to work in the Salt Ponds and Pans...on the said Key' and three were elected for Salt Key.<sup>16</sup> Becoming a commissioner was not necessarily a voluntary affair. If elected, a commissioner who refused to serve could be excluded from the salt season that year. Regulation 27 stipulated, 'If any Commissioners, after being elected as aforesaid, shall refuse to serve without giving good and sufficient Reasons for the Refusal, he shall not be entitled to any Share in the Ponds or Pans for that Season'.<sup>17</sup> For 'his Trouble and Service', however, each commissioner was given 'one full Share out of the Ponds and

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<sup>16</sup> The National Archives, An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands, and for suspending an Act passed in the Eleventh Year of His Majesty's Reign, initiated, an Act for imposing Fines and Penalties on Persons offending against the Regulations made or to be made for the Government of the Salt Ponds within these Islands, 7 February 1774, BT 6/74.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Pans', which may have presented a conflict of interest because these commissioners had juridical powers.<sup>18</sup> If there were complaints or regulatory breaches, the commissioners would hear and settle the case, handing out punishments and penalties if and when necessary. This conflict of interest did concern some salt gatherers and is an issue this chapter shall return to.

All salt gatherers had certain obligations to these commissioners, which varied across the different ponds that could be found on Turks Islands. In the private ponds, as noted, the salt gatherers had to present their company on or before the tenth of February in order to qualify for their shares. However, they were not allowed to leave the saltpans for any period of time during the subsequent season without first notifying a commissioner. Moreover, if a salt gatherer wished to sell, barter or exchange one or more of his shares, he would have to seek prior permission from the commissioners. Failure to comply with these regulations meant fiscal penalties or total exclusion. In the event that shares were forfeited, control of them reverted back to the commissioners, and 'all forfeited and deserted Shares of the Ponds and Pans shall be raked for the general benefit and Advantage'.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the private ponds, the salt gatherers also needed to fulfil obligations in the general ponds. At the beginning of each salt season, commissioners would request a number of hands from each company to work the communal pond, 'and every Person neglecting or refusing to send the number of Hands required, shall be fined'.<sup>20</sup> Overall, these regulations reveal a desire to ensure the private and general ponds were as productive as possible: salt gatherers had to use them efficiently to maintain their shares.

While it is apparent that there were at least two types of ponds at Turks Islands, another regulation hints at a third type of pond called the 'unappropriated' pond. This regulation stipulated that,

All Persons who shall arrive at Turks Islands, after the general laying out of the Pans and Ponds, shall be entitled to work in the unappropriated Parts of the Ponds, under the Direction of His Majesty's Commander, and any Person who shall make any new Pan in such parts of the Ponds, as

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



shall be allotted to them, shall be allowed to enjoy the sole Benefit of such Pans for that Year.<sup>21</sup>

These ponds were the unclean and uncultivated ponds, and this regulation reflects how these rules were formulated to encourage industrious habits and efficient salt extraction. If a salt gatherer could, through his private efforts, make an unappropriated pond productive, then he was allowed to enjoy its benefits for that season. However, this right was only for one season. In subsequent years, this newly cultivated pan would become part of the share system. All these pond types – private, general and uncultivated – were thus heavily controlled and supervised by the commissioners, who sought maximum productivity.

This regulatory system was a necessary step towards effectively managing the ponds as a shared resource system. On a traditional English commons, the decision to hold strips in private during crop season and throw them open to common afterwards meant ‘necessarily that some rules about cropping are observed so that spring and winter-sown crops may be grown in separate fields or furlongs’.<sup>22</sup> This ‘ordering’ of agricultural activities was ‘regulated by an assembly of cultivators – the manorial court...or...a village meeting’.<sup>23</sup> As Neeson has argued, ‘peasant agriculture required cooperation and the protection of common interests’.<sup>24</sup> To do so, commoners ‘elected officers to enforce by-laws, and employed pinders and haywards to summarily fine offenders or to bring them to court’.<sup>25</sup> Trespassing was punished, as were actions that would ‘damnify his Neighbour thereby’ such as bringing ‘waggons, carts or any other implements on to any balk’.<sup>26</sup> These forms of collective management were reproduced under the Head Rights System. Like a commons, the salt ponds had a regulatory body in the form of the King’s Agent and his commissioners, who were elected by the salt gatherers each year to preside over the following salt season. Their role was to supervise the fair division and regulation of the ponds. As in Neeson’s Warwickshire commons, specific regulations were enacted to prevent self-interested activities that would harm the public or another

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Thirsk, ‘The Common Fields’, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 319.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 320.

salt gatherer's pans. For example, Regulation 11 stipulated that 'No white person shall, on any pretence whatsoever, wilfully move, or cause to be moved, any Salt Marks, on pain of total Exclusion from any Share', while Regulation 23 punished 'any Person' who 'shall throw pickle, wheelbarrows, or walk through any Pans the property of another, so as thereby to damage the same'.<sup>27</sup> As James Acheson has argued, shared resource systems can work, despite increasing population pressures and scarcity, when there are effective cooperative practices in place.<sup>28</sup>

### *The salt gatherers' response*

While the 1774 regulations helped to maintain the saltpan system, they were not unanimously accepted. There was resistance to certain measures and a major source of opposition came from the Bermuda Government and some of its salt gatherers. The 1774 Bahamian Act contained within it a suspending clause, which required Royal Assent. Upon consultation, London ministers decided to converse with the Bermudian legislature, whose subjects it understood were predominantly concerned with the Turks Island trade. In response, the Governor, Council and Assembly of Bermuda sent a Memorial to the Board of Trade in London expressing great anxiety.<sup>29</sup> In particular, they warned 'that no Regulations should be countenanced which may have the effect to restrain any of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects in the prosecution of those Branches of Commerce, which are in their nature and by usage *free and unrestrained*'.<sup>30</sup> The regulation that stipulated the salt gatherers must be present with their companies on or before the tenth of February was viewed as 'particularly oppressive'.<sup>31</sup> The Memorial clarified these concerns:

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<sup>27</sup> The National Archives, An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands, and for suspending an Act passed in the Eleventh Year of His Majesty's Reign, initiated, an Act for imposing Fines and Penalties on Persons offending against the Regulations made or to be made for the Government of the Salt Ponds within these Islands, 7 February 1774, BT 6/74.

<sup>28</sup> James M Acheson, 'Private Land and Common Oceans: Analysis of the Development of Property Rights', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 56 No. 1 (Feb., 2015), pp. 28-55.

<sup>29</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Governor, the Council and the Assembly of Bermuda, 12 July 1776, BT 6/74.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

They [the inhabitants of Bermuda] remain at Turks Islands ‘till November in order to dispose of their Salt, and therefore have scarcely enough time to return to their Families and attend to their necessary Business there and be in Time at Turks Islands to prevent an exclusion from the benefit of the Season. [A]s the Salt seldom makes at Turks Islands ‘till the Month of April, such early attendance is quite unnecessary.<sup>32</sup>

For other inhabitants, the regulations lacked legitimacy because the Bahamas Governor compelled the salt gatherers to sign them. Such was the belief of a plaintiff in an illuminating court case in 1773, which illustrated the potential for conflicts of interest to obstruct justice. This court case involved plaintiff Paul Bascome and defendant Samuel Tatem and took place at the King’s Bench in Bermuda.<sup>33</sup> It referred to an incident at Turks Islands on 1 March 1772 whereby Bascome accused Tatem of having forcibly broken into his close ‘and at diverse other days and times...dug up, raked, gathered, carried away and detained 20,000 bushels salt, valued at £500 Bermuda currency’.<sup>34</sup> Bascome stated that as every British subject had a right to rake salt at Turks Islands ‘without any trouble, hindrance, molestation or disturbance of any person’, Tatem was guilty of trespass.<sup>35</sup> However, Tatem, who was a commissioner, defended his actions as being guided by legal authority. The regulations stated that any person who wished to gather salt at Turks Islands had to be present before the commissioners by the tenth of February and they had to remain at their respective key for the duration of the season. As Bascome had sailed to Hispaniola prior to the tenth of February and had been absent from Grand Turk for ten days, Tatem believed Bascome had breached these regulations. As a result, he should forfeit his shares for that season.

Although the records are incomplete, it seems the court ruled in favour of Bascome. He was able to demonstrate that he was the victim of a vindictive commissioner who had used the regulations to his personal advantage. While according to the letter of the law Bascome may have been liable to forfeit his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bermuda National Archives, Samuel Tatem versus Paul Bascome – Plea of Trespass relating to salt raking rights in Turks Islands, 1773, PA 878.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

private shares, he should not have been excluded from the unappropriated ponds, which were open to British subjects at all times.<sup>36</sup> Yet as Bascome's witness testimonies made clear, he was not only denied his private shares but also access to the unappropriated ponds. Such an act was 'illegal' for it had no basis in the regulations.<sup>37</sup>

But Bascome went further, denying the overall efficacy of the regulations in the first place. Having produced letters from the Secretary of State, Bascome understood the regulations were only intended to be 'such as shall be necessary for the benefit and advantage of the trade in general and for improving the staple so essential to the Fisheries of this Kingdom'.<sup>38</sup> He questioned whether anyone would believe his exclusion from salt gathering in 1772 fulfilled these conditions and consequently whether the regulations answered the purpose. Furthermore, it was understood that the commissioners would settle any complaints. Bascome's lawyer lamented how this was 'an insult to Common Sense. To empower a person aggrieved to complain to the persons who have injured him'.<sup>39</sup> For Bascome, the commissioners were 'complete despots', supported by a system that lacked legitimacy because the regulations were 'signed by compulsion'.<sup>40</sup> Given that Bermudian seafarers depended on the salt trade for their livelihood, 'persons in such a situation might have been made to sign anything...they would have signed a Carte Blanche'.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, not all the salt gatherers supported these regulations and it would be a mistake to interpret them uncritically. However, they remained in force until the expiry of the Act in 1779. At that point, Symmer decided to travel to London with a proposal for the better defence of the islands and a revised set of regulations. In London, Symmer wrote to the Secretary of State and his recommendations were referred to the Board of Trade in December 1780. After a

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<sup>36</sup> The National Archives, An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands, and for suspending an Act passed in the Eleventh Year of His Majesty's Reign, initiated, an Act for imposing Fines and Penalties on Persons offending against the Regulations made or to be made for the Government of the Salt Ponds within these Islands, 7 February 1774, BT 6/74.

<sup>37</sup> Bermuda National Archives, Samuel Tatem versus Paul Bascome – Plea of Trespass relating to salt raking rights in Turks Islands, 1773, PA 878.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

prompting in January, the Board of Trade reviewed the proposals and summoned Symmer, who was ‘questioned by their Lordships as to such particulars as they thought fit’.<sup>42</sup> Following further deliberation, it was agreed that while the defence of the islands fell within other departments, the matter of salt pond regulations was within their remit. Symmer’s regulations were considered, adjusted and redrafted. They became Royal Regulations, requiring endorsement from the King and a draft was prepared and sent to His Majesty. In its covering letter, the Board of Trade highlighted the need to ‘maturely’ consider regulations that would not only answer their ‘proposed End’ but also ‘the local Circumstances of the Community’.<sup>43</sup> At the Court of St James on 29 June 1781, the Royal Regulations were read, approved and signed by His Majesty and Privy Council ‘for the good Government of the Salt Ponds at the said Islands, and those that resort there to make Salt’.<sup>44</sup> The King immediately ordered his Secretary of State to give the necessary instructions for their execution and to inform the King’s Agent to duly publish them in Turks Islands.<sup>45</sup>

The content of the Royal Regulations was a simplification of the regulations of 1774.<sup>46</sup> Whereas there had been twenty-seven regulations in 1774, by 1781 these had been reduced to fifteen either by omitting certain regulations or combining two together. In truth, there were only two new regulations: one which referred to slavery (and shall be discussed in Chapter 6) while the other stipulated that ‘no person on any account shall be allowed to erect any Building or Inclosure whatever, on what is deemed Public Ground’, suggesting a greater proliferation of homes, warehouses and wharfs by 1781.<sup>47</sup> Otherwise, the most important regulations that delineated the Head Rights System remained unchanged and intact, while the more fastidious were dropped.

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<sup>42</sup> The National Archives, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty’s Commissioners for promoting the Trade of this Kingdom and for inspecting and improving his Majesty’s Plantations in America and Elsewhere For the Year 1781, 6 February 1781, CO 391/88 f. 72.

<sup>43</sup> The National Archives, Letter from the Board of Trade to the King, 13 February 1781, CO 24/4 f. 198.

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives, Approval of the Royal Regulations at the Court of St James, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 128-129.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The National Archives, The Royal Regulations, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 134-137.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Since the King and not the Bahamas Government had authorised the Royal Regulations, evidence suggests these were widely accepted and highly regarded. In subsequent years, Bermudian salt gatherers would regularly invoke them in their defence. Overall, the Royal Regulations were praised for being sensitive to local conditions, applauded for protecting the rights of British subjects, and revered for coming from the highest source of authority in Britain. Indeed, the efficacy of the Royal Regulations was demonstrated by the fact they remained in force until 1845. In so doing, they solidified a system that distinguished the island's economy from amongst its peers in the British Caribbean.

### **A counterpoint to the sugar plantation model**

The Head Rights System was a significant departure from the plantation model. Many historians have shown that following the sugar revolution in Barbados, and later Jamaica, the sugar islands of the Caribbean gravitated fast toward the engrossment of large estates into private hands. While initial settlement may have involved more diverse economic activities and yeoman white farmers, early-eighteenth-century agriculture was increasingly a monoculture with large estates pushing small farmers off most of the valuable fertile lands. In Jamaica, the Crown initially reserved the land but that policy was abandoned in 1678.<sup>48</sup> A map of 1685 already showed 246 sugar plantations.<sup>49</sup> As Richard Sheridan has stated, after the sugar boom, 'a class of large planters came into possession of the lion's share of the fixed and moveable wealth...[whereas]...a much larger group of small farmers and indentured servants were made redundant'.<sup>50</sup> Wealthy planters, such as Simon Taylor, were allowed to flourish in this environment.<sup>51</sup> At the time of his passing, Taylor owned six sugar estates and three cattle ranches or pens in Jamaica.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, 'Trade, Plunder and Economic Development in Early English Jamaica, 1655-1689', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 39 No. 2 (May, 1986), p. 211.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>50</sup> R B Sheridan, 'The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (Aug., 1965), p. 295.

<sup>51</sup> R B Sheridan, 'Simon Taylor, Sugar Tycoon of Jamaica, 1740-1813', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 45 No. 4 (Oct., 1971), pp. 285-296.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

Whereas planter capitalists owned land in a legal sense and could plough money back into their estates, the same was not true for the salt ponds of Turks Islands. There, salt gatherers relied on the longevity of a system that promised them a right to annual shares, but did not offer them the security of proprietorship. In these salt islands, land was not freehold. The shares themselves also had distinctive characteristics. Whereas a plantation could be sold or sequestered in a will, shares legally could not be passed down families and they could not be sold without the commissioners' permission. Even if permission was granted, this agreement lasted only for the duration of one salt season. At the end of the season, ownership of the salt ponds reverted back to the Crown. Custom would, presumably, have ensured that salt gatherers tended to be granted more or less the same ponds they worked each year but this was not guaranteed within the regulations. In a marked departure from the sugar economy, the salt economy was not based on a right to property. It was based on a right to take part in an industry. In that sense, the Head Rights System, as a shared resource system, was surprisingly reminiscent of an English commons.

Moreover, though sugar plantations were, or could be, sold to the highest bidder, Turks Islands' regulations ensured a salt gatherer could not use capital to buy a way into the ponds. More important than flaunting money was an ability to demonstrate that he could effectively manage and maximise his pans' output. As a result, shares were distributed according to the number of labourers within companies – according to the number of 'heads'. The more servants and enslaved persons a salt gatherer had to work the ponds, the greater his portion of the ponds. While arguably this could be linked to capital as wealthier individuals could afford more hands and acquire more shares, it does make for a significant legal departure. In the sugar islands, the acquisition of land involved the transfer of capital from one owner to another. If a planter bought a plantation for £10,000, he was £10,000 worse off (although he now had a plantation). However, in Turks Islands, a salt gatherer did not buy his shares for he had a free right to them and it was the size of his entourage, and not his pocket, that governed how many shares he got.

Finally, the salt economy of Turks Islands was a highly supervised form of activity. The King's Agent and his commissioners were empowered to ensure the salt gatherers utilised the ponds to their maximum benefit. Consequently,

those salt gatherers who did not look after their ponds or fulfil their obligations would have to pay fiscal penalties or risk total exclusion. The Head Rights System was designed to ensure fairness and order but, importantly, it was geared towards productivity as a collective responsibility. This was a departure from the sugar economies where notions of private property allowed owners to effectively do as they pleased within the walls of their plantations. As Sidney Mintz has explained, 'plantation regions tended to consist of uninterrupted series of manor-like (but capitalistic) estates'.<sup>53</sup> However, on Turks Islands, the supervisory antennae of the Royal Regulations reached within an individual's salt pans, and the acquisition of rights required significant obligations in return. A salt gatherer could not do as he pleased. He had to prove he was worth his salt – or he was out.

Consequently, whereas a sugar planter had ownership rights of access, withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation, the salt gatherer's bundle of property rights was more complicated.<sup>54</sup> He had the right to access the ponds (if he was present before the tenth of February) and he had the right to withdraw salt from the ponds (once the King's Agent gave the signal to start salt harvesting). However, the King's Agent and his commissioners oversaw the general management of the ponds; they had the right to exclude participants from the ponds; and they had the last say when bartering, selling or exchanging pond shares. Understood from this perspective, the salt gatherer's rights were more limited and the reason was clear: he partook in a shared resource system of shifting land tenures, and not one of freehold private property.

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<sup>53</sup> Sidney W Mintz, 'The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area', in Michael M Horowitz (ed.), *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean: an anthropological reader* (Garden City: Natural History Press, 1971), p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Edella Schlager and Elinor Ostrom have identified five associated rights to private property that include access, withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation. See Acheson, 'Private Land and Common Oceans', p. 28; and Edella Schlager and Elinor Ostrom, 'Property Rights Regimes and Coastal Fisheries: An empirical analysis', in Terry Anderson and Randy Simmons (eds), *The political economy of customs and cultures: informal solutions to the common problem* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), pp. 13-41.



## A creole commons

During this period, one might have expected a drift towards privatisation throughout the British Atlantic world. Certainly, in Britain, this was the prevailing trend. From the fifteenth century to the early nineteenth century, the enclosure movement saw the fencing off of the English countryside as landlords progressively raised rents, annulled common-right practices and created vast numbers of dispossessed commoners.<sup>55</sup> Those who pressed for enclosure – landlords, capitalist entrepreneurs and imperial rulers – urged it was in the national interest and critical to refashioning Britain's economy towards international trade and commerce.<sup>56</sup> By the eighteenth century, there was 'an agreement that Britain's power lay in her navy, her merchant marine, her manufacturers as well as her agriculture'.<sup>57</sup> But there was widespread concern over labour supply shortages. Enclosure offered a solution. For Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, creating an Atlantic proletariat from the enclosure of the commons in England was the first and necessary step in the accumulation of capital and the transatlantic redeployment of labour.<sup>58</sup> Imperial rulers wanted commoners to become the wage labourers of empire. Key theorists agreed, extolling the virtues of private property against what they increasingly perceived as the backwardness, primitiveness, and even barbaric nature of 'commoning'. As Allan Greer has pointed out, 'a pro-colonist, pro-enclosure variant can be traced from [John] Locke and his predecessors through the Scottish Enlightenment, where the idea took root that private property was the very hallmark of civilisation'.<sup>59</sup> As a new vision of Britain's place in the Atlantic took shape, its countryside was progressively enclosed and its commoners turned into a wandering proletariat.

When faced with colonisation, then, several historians have been 'tempted to think in terms of a great "enclosure movement" that took shape first in England and Western Europe and then extended overseas to the New World,

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<sup>55</sup> Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 7 and pp. 43-47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Allan Greer, 'Commons and Enclosure in the Colonisation of North America', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 117 No. 2 (Apr., 2012), p. 386.

bringing survey lines, fences and legal rules fostering exclusive access and transferability'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Rediker and Linebaugh have remarked, 'when the English took possession of land overseas, they did so by building fences and hedges, the markers of enclosure and private property'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, E P Thompson has argued for 'a connection between enclosure within England and the imposition of private property across the overseas British Empire...pointing to a long-term global movement to privatise the commons that emanated outward from the British Isles'.<sup>62</sup> As this chapter has argued, a private property regime was rapidly evident in the sugar islands of the British Caribbean.

However, this grand, if not teleological, narrative needs some refashioning. Colonisation did equate to enclosure in many places, but as Rediker and Linebaugh have also pointed out, the dispossessed commoners of England did not suddenly disappear.<sup>63</sup> Their memories of an alternative way of life were not immediately forgotten.<sup>64</sup> Rather, they became the new proletariat of the Atlantic. They dispersed as sailors, settlers and indentured servants on board Royal Navy and merchant ships and across the Atlantic littoral in newly settled colonial societies. Linebaugh and Rediker pose the tantalising question: if given the opportunity, what sort of society and economy would they choose to develop?<sup>65</sup> Would they tend toward private property regimes as in England, or would the 'many-headed hydra' raise itself on a commons somewhere along the margins of empire?

There are examples to suggest a transfer of 'the commons' could and did take place. Barbuda, for instance, was one large cattle pen: the vast majority of its lands were open to common pasture.<sup>66</sup> Inhabitants lived in the only village on the island, Codrington, and supported themselves through a combination of subsistence farming and animal husbandry. Their livestock roamed freely on the common pasture and was sold to the neighbouring island of Antigua for use on its plantations. These commons were a true commons – there was no fencing or

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 365.

<sup>61</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> E P Thompson summarised in Greer, 'Commons and Enclosure', pp. 365-366.

<sup>63</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>66</sup> Riva Berleant-Schiller, 'The Social and Economic Role of Cattle in Barbuda', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 67 No. 3 (Jul., 1977), pp. 300-302.

variations in access across time and space. However, it is also the case that the whole island, as a single entity, was leased to the Codrington family. It functioned overall as one large private estate.

Several of North America's first settlement towns offer historians more typical examples of common property regimes that were valued because of their ability to pool risk within an otherwise uncertain contact zone.<sup>67</sup> Robert Ellickson, a knowledgeable figure on property rights, found that Jamestown, Plymouth and Salt Lake City all initially had common property regimes in which inhabitants worked collectively and were given an equal share in the settlements' produce.<sup>68</sup> As Stuart Banner has reflected,

In Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, Illinois and Missouri...English and French settlers *replicated the property regimes they remembered from Europe*, in which a significant portion of the local productive land was understood as an asset belonging first to the community, and secondarily to the individual.<sup>69</sup>

While these common property regimes may not have lasted long – and most did not – their early existence suggests that many European colonists were keen to transplant familiar types of agricultural systems, at least at first.<sup>70</sup> As has been demonstrated, the Head Rights System at Turks Islands did share many elements of a traditional English commons, suggesting an early Atlantic transfer may have taken place.

However, the balance of evidence indicates the Head Rights System may have owed more of its final form to local evolution. There were aspects of the Head Rights System that were distinctive, adaptive, if not creole in character. To demonstrate this, the chapter will analyse three variables that influenced the Turks Island salt economy. These were: the evolution and transfer of Bermudian land tenure regimes; the specific endorsement and protection of the Head Rights

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<sup>67</sup> For the effects that European colonists' commons could have on indigenous land practices, see Greer, 'Colonisation and Enclosure', pp. 365-386.

<sup>68</sup> Robert C Ellickson, 'Property in Land', *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 102 No. 6 (Apr., 1993), pp. 1335-1443.

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Banner, 'The Political Function of the Commons: Changing Conceptions of Property and Sovereignty in Missouri, 1750-1850', *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 41 No. 1 (Jan., 1997), pp. 65-66. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Barbuda's common property regime persisted and was still operational in the 1960s. See Berleant-Schiller, 'The Social and Economic Role of Cattle in Barbuda', pp. 299-309.

System by officials in London; and the nature and status of salt production in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

*An intra-colonial transfer*

In his study of property regimes, Ellickson has argued that private property regimes do not have to be unequal property regimes.<sup>71</sup> Three years after Bermuda was first settled, the Somers Island Company ordered a survey of the entire island.<sup>72</sup> In its wake, Bermuda was divided into eight tribes containing roughly 1,250 acres each. These tribes were then split into shares of twenty-five acres each. Each newly settled inhabitant of Bermuda was allowed up to ten shares, or 250 acres, for which they paid quit-rents. While the tribes were named after ‘eight of the chiefest persons and deepest adventurers’ of the colony, these original owners were not allowed more shares than the average proprietor.<sup>73</sup> If a landowner did obtain more than his fair share of 250 acres through marriage or inheritance, he was obliged to ‘divest himself of the excess acreage within a limited time’.<sup>74</sup> As a result, land ownership was restricted in Bermuda from the beginning.

Such a land scheme did not encourage the acquisition of large individual wealth. According to Virginia Bernhard, by the end of the seventeenth century, ‘the richest planters and merchants had holdings of only a few hundred acres and fortunes of no more than 100 pounds’.<sup>75</sup> In comparison, when tobacco planter Robert Beverley died in Virginia in 1687, ‘he left a fortune of 50,000 acres and 5000 pounds’.<sup>76</sup> In Bermuda, the limited size of the islands put pressure on the resources available and forced inhabitants to carefully manage their assets (see Chapter 3). Consequently, ‘life in Bermuda was marked by limits: everything from profits to wages to the killing of young tortoises was closely regulated’.<sup>77</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup> Ellickson, ‘Property in Land’, p. 1356.

<sup>72</sup> Virginia Bernhard, ‘Bermuda and Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: A Comparative View’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 19 No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

this situation, ‘there was little an individual could do to enrich himself at the expense of his neighbours or his servants’.<sup>78</sup> Instead, land and wealth was shared.

Consequently, Bermudians approached Turks Islands with a heritage of dividing land proportionally amongst themselves. Given the features of the Head Rights System, it is not inconceivable that Bermudians were informed by their own tenure practices as they developed their salt raking activities. Though not private property, Turks Islands’ ponds were divided into equal shares amongst its salt gatherers. However, pinpointing customary practices before the formal regulation of the Head Rights System is difficult. The earliest record the author has found of Bermuda’s salt-raking activities in Turks Islands dates from 1699 and refers to a petition written by several masters of sloops whose vessels had been seized by the Bahamas Government. Of Turks Islands, they wrote, ‘we humbly conceive that it is the *King’s Island*, and does not belong to the Lord Proprietors of Providence, the Bermudians having had a constant trade without any molestation or trouble for Forty Yeares last past’.<sup>79</sup> While it is hard to draw firm conclusions, by calling Turks Islands the ‘King’s Island’ the petitioners suggest they understood Turks Islands as a commons held by the King in which their trade there was customarily free. Certainly, they were not private property.

This suggests that, prior to the regulations of 1767, the salt trade at Turks Islands may have been like the salt trade at Cape Verde.<sup>80</sup> There, the process of harvesting solar-evaporated salt was fairly straightforward. Ships would arrive at Cape Verde in December, knowing the salt season could last until July. Once they came upon the western side of Mayo, they would anchor within 200 yards of the shore. This shore consisted of a sand bank, behind which were extensive salt marshes, divided into hundreds of saltpans with channels and sluices, filled with ‘a strong brine...to the depth of about eight inches’.<sup>81</sup> Those sailors who first arrived would clean out their chosen pits from mud and impurities, before other merchant and naval ships arrived to do the same. The sun and wind would then concentrate the brine until salt crystals began to fall out of the solution to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> The National Archives, Deposition of Masters of Sloops and Vessels to Board of Trade and Plantations, received 22 February 1699, CO 37/1 f.178.

<sup>80</sup> William Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt...as now practiced in Most Parts of the World; with several improvements proposed in that art for the use of the British Dominions* (London: C Davis, A Millar and R Dosley, 1748), pp. 16-24.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

the bottom of the pan. Sailors would rake this salt ‘twice a week...into little heaps’ until it was ‘fit to be put on board their ships’.<sup>82</sup> At that point, small boats were loaded with salt and it was transferred into the holds of vessels anchored offshore. Once the hold was full, the captain would declare it was time to move on. This entire process could take as little as two weeks, but in unfavourable conditions, it could take months. Any ships that arrived after all the pits were occupied, would have to wait until a proportion of the pits became free again.

These records of eighteenth-century Cape Verde cannot be over-extrapolated for Turks Islands but the available evidence indicates Bermudians also visited Turks Islands on an ad-hoc basis and could arrive whenever they wished. This changed after 1767. By the mid-eighteenth century, Turks Islands’ salt trade was more significant with a growing number of participants. The creation of the King’s Agent’s commission had placed the islands’ defence higher on the imperial agenda, lowering the associated risks of foreign attack and increasing the attractiveness of the trade. While settlement was encouraged, the expected increase in salt gatherers challenged the islands’ limited physical capacity and natural resources. In February 1767, Symmer wrote to the Secretary of State reckoning that ‘in four weeks’ time the number of Male Settlers here will increase to upwards of Five Hundred White Men’.<sup>83</sup> Within this context, the ponds required a clear system of economic regulation. The salt gatherers, who were accustomed to Bermuda’s tenure systems, were consulted and a system implemented that divided the ponds equally. Knowledge of one system likely informed the next, resulting in a strong resemblance between the two.

### *The endorsement of the British Government*

However, while the initial framing of the regulations may have drawn on Bermudian traditions and customary practices, the longevity of this shared resource system suggests additional factors were operative. Acheson has argued that land tenure systems are determined by a resource’s level of ‘economic

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>83</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Shelburne, 27 February 1767, CO 23/16/205.

defendability’.<sup>84</sup> A resource has economic defendability when the benefits of excluding others from its use outweigh the transaction costs of doing so. Transaction costs can include, for example, maintaining a fence around a field or paying for monitoring systems. Many variables can impact a resource’s economic defendability. One important factor Acheson identified was government or state intervention.<sup>85</sup> In eighteenth-century England, the final enclosure of the commons was achieved through Parliamentary Acts, which were responsible for fencing in approximately 22 per cent of England’s land.<sup>86</sup> Between 1800 and 1814, Parliament passed almost a hundred Acts on enclosure.<sup>87</sup> For Neeson, this ‘institutional and political intervention’ marked the real end of the peasantry in early-modern England.<sup>88</sup> She stated, ‘It was no small event...No other attack on common right succeeded as well as enclosure. No other means could be found to raise rents as far or as fast’.<sup>89</sup> In this case, the action of the British Government significantly reduced the transaction costs of fencing in the commons by providing proponents of enclosure with a firm piece of legislation to pursue their actions with.

It follows that the British Government could significantly increase transaction costs *if* it supported the rights of commoners and the infrastructure of shared resource systems. Prior to parliamentary enclosure in England, this had been the case as ‘common right was defended at the centre of government in sermons, pamphlets, judgements and speeches for three hundred years’, frustrating landlords’ ability to fence off their lands.<sup>90</sup> Parliamentary support would prove powerful for the shared resource system of Turks Islands. However, first it needed a good reason to become involved.

In the eighteenth-century Atlantic, salt had become a commodity of interest to many metropolitan actors. One of the era’s most significant natural philosophers was William Brownrigg. He was not a marginal figure in British society. His prolific research carried weight and he was awarded the prestigious

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<sup>84</sup> Acheson, ‘Private Land and Common Oceans’, pp. 28-55.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> Gregory Clark and Anthony Clark, ‘Common Rights to Land in England, 1475-1839’, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 61 No. 4 (Dec., 2001), p. 1010.

<sup>87</sup> Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 45.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 329.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

Royal Society's Copley Medal in 1766, an accolade shared by such celebrated figures as Benjamin Franklin, James Cook and Charles Darwin. Earlier in 1748, Brownrigg produced a treatise on salt production, which highlighted the pressing need to improve methods of salt production for the benefit of the British Empire.<sup>91</sup> *The Art of Making Common Salt* emphasised how Britain relied too heavily upon foreign powers, particularly the Dutch, for salt, while the quality and quantity of its own production lagged behind.<sup>92</sup> By the 1750s, salt was not only valued as a condiment for the table or as a preservative for domestic consumption. It had become a vital, irreplaceable means to preserve animal proteins during long oceanic voyages.

With the advent of Atlantic empires, Britain's economic prowess became tied to commerce and the strength of her navy and merchant marine. As Rediker and Linebaugh point out, in 1649 officials realised they had only fifty naval ships 'to defend their republic' with.<sup>93</sup> This precarious situation prompted them to 'take immediate steps to extend their commercial and military power at sea'.<sup>94</sup> Parliament passed the Navigation Act in 1651 and the Articles of War in 1652. In the process the Royal Navy was transformed. By 1688, it had 173 ships and 42,000 sailors.<sup>95</sup> By the 1690s, 'the Royal Navy had become England's greatest employer of labour, its greatest consumer of material and its greatest industrial enterprise'.<sup>96</sup> These trends persisted in the following century. Feeding thousands of hungry sailors on long transoceanic voyages suddenly became a colossal task. At the same time, the growing enslaved populations of the Caribbean were increasingly reliant on external sources of food as land for planting provisions gave way to sugar cultivation. In this context, salt was progressively of more importance to the health of sailors and enslaved persons alike.<sup>97</sup> Salted cod, beef and pork were in high demand and the Admiralty, Merchant Navy and British

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<sup>91</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. ix.

<sup>93</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 145.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>97</sup> For a comparison of the need for salted goods within the French Atlantic world, see Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 63 (Spring, 2007), pp. 22-24.



Government were all deeply concerned with the production and acquisition of the vital preserving ingredient.

Consequently, many physicians and natural philosophers were encouraged to search for an improved method for producing a curing salt. In his preface, Brownrigg fore-fronted this support stating ‘that august body of the Commons of Great Britain, having taken into consideration the great importance of this art [of making salt], judged some improvements proposed therein worthy of its regard and encouragement’.<sup>98</sup> Another contemporary whose research received parliamentary support was Thomas Lowndes. In 1746, he sent his proposal to the Secretary of the Admiralty stating ‘my encouragement for this undertaking comes from the House of Commons’.<sup>99</sup> The Admiralty’s pressing need for salt was clear. Having received Lowndes’ proposal, it contacted the College of Physicians requesting their expert opinion, emphasising that ‘their Lordships’ were ‘desirous of encouraging any reasonable Scheme, that may tend to the preservation of the health of the seamen on board his Majesty’s ships’.<sup>100</sup> Many important metropolitan bodies were keen to obtain this white gold.

Given such interest, Symmer recognised the potential of Turks Island salt for providing both the quantity and quality needed for curing the fish of the empire’s northern cod fisheries. He and subsequent King’s Agents wrote on many occasions to the Secretary of State expressing the benefit of Turks Island salt for this purpose. In 1766, he called Turks Islands, ‘a Valuable mine for our Fisheries in North America’ where ‘the Salt has answered so well, both in curing Fish and Meat’.<sup>101</sup> Two years later, he reaffirmed, ‘Turks Islands are of more real consequence to North America on Account of the Fishery and Salt Provisions, than all other West India Islands belonging to the Crown’.<sup>102</sup> Bermudians also recognised this advantage. The Colonial Agent for the islands wrote to the King’s Council, the Treasury and the Admiralty stating, ‘the Bermudians...have

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<sup>98</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, p. ix.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Lowndes, *Brine-Salt Improved: Or, The method of making Salt from Brine, that shall be as good or better than French bay-salt: in a letter to the Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty* (London, 1746), pp. 6-7.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>101</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Shelburne, 18 March 1767, CO 23/16/209.

<sup>102</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Germain, 22 September 1778, CO 23/24/24.

for near a Century been chiefly supported by gathering Salt at Turks Islands’ and ‘by their Commerce in that Article they have rendered very great Advantages to your Majesty’s Fisheries in the Northern Colonies’.<sup>103</sup>

The necessity for ‘improving the staple of a commodity, so essential to the fisheries of this Kingdom’ ensured London officials took a disproportionate interest in the affairs of the salt gatherers.<sup>104</sup> From 1766, the Secretary of State and Commissioners of Trade and Plantations continuously sought to encourage the trade without obstructing its access. Among London officials, it was understood that the Bermudian salt gatherers were migratory inhabitants who provided most of Turks Islands’ labour force during the salt season. As such, they instructed legislators to respect these migrations in order to protect the trade. For example, the Secretary of State castigated Symmer’s early attempt to restrict access. He wrote to Governor Shirley in 1768, ‘I have reason to believe...that His Majesty’s subjects of the Bermuda Islands, have been obstructed and restrained in the liberty that they have long enjoyed, of collecting Salt from the Ponds in Turk’s Islands’.<sup>105</sup> Lord Hillsborough went on to instruct the Governor to personally look into these matters and ‘not countenance any regulations which may have the effect to restrain any of His Majesty’s subjects in the prosecution of those branches of commerce, which are in their nature, and by useage, free and unrestrained’.<sup>106</sup> This was an official intervention that could not be ignored. Consequently, the 1774 regulations dropped any restrictions on the industry’s access.

However, London’s protection of the salt trade went further with the introduction of the Royal Regulations. These were agreed at the highest circles of governance, signifying these islands were of prodigious concern. The Royal Regulations provided Bermudian salt gatherers with an unprecedented level of protection. In subsequent years, whenever the salt gatherers felt threatened, these

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<sup>103</sup> Bermuda National Archives, Memorial from Colonial Agent of Bermuda John Brickwood relating to Turks Islands to His Majesty in Council, Commissioners of the Treasury and Commissioners of the Admiralty, c. 1790, Sessional Papers: Petitions 1781-1819.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Letter from the Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas’, 20 July 1768, in The Governor, Council, and Assembly of Bermuda, *A State of the Claim of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects to the Right of Gathering Salt at Turks Islands* (London, 1790), p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.

regulations were consistently invoked in their defence. Two examples prove illustrative. In a copy of an Address from the Inhabitants of Bermuda at Turks Islands to the Bahamas Governor in 1789, the authors wrote,

We beg leave with all due deference to suggest to your Lordship that...the Royal Regulations framed at the Court of St James in the year 1781 for the equal Distribution and allotment of the Salt Ponds on these islands...were not only then Considered but have since by Annual Experience been found in a large degree productive.<sup>107</sup>

Second, in the Address of the Body of Salt Gatherers to King's Agent Alexander Murray in 1790, the petitioners wrote,

The Royal Regulations framed at the Court of St James's in June 1781 for the good government of the Bermudians and those resorting here to make salt, [have] been found in ample degree productive of every advantage which our most Gracious Sovereign in his paternal solicitude for us was led to expect.<sup>108</sup>

Though petitions and memorials have a political agenda and need to be treated with a healthy scepticism, the consistent invocation of the Royal Regulations confirm the salt gatherers had, at least publicly, accepted their implementation. The Crown's endorsement of the Head Rights System provided a very effective support to its continuation. After 1781, the nature of its shares and mixed tenure system could not be easily revoked. Any manoeuvre to privatise the ponds would need Royal approval. Effectively, the question of economic defendability had become redundant. The transaction costs to enclose the ponds were insurmountable so long as the salt gatherers had His Majesty's protection. This protection was offered because salt had become an essential product to the fisheries and functioning of the British Atlantic world.

This unfurling imperial support offers a caveat to the persuasive narrative offered in Rediker and Linebaugh's *The Many-Headed Hydra*.<sup>109</sup> In it, they shine a light on the strenuous 'herculean' efforts of the British Government to clamp down on its unruly Atlantic proletariat whenever it reared its ugly 'hydra-like'

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<sup>107</sup> The National Archives, Copy of an Address of the Inhabitants of Bermuda at Turks Islands to Governor Dunmore of the Bahamas, 20 July 1789, CO 37/42/12.

<sup>108</sup> The National Archives, Copy of an Address of the Bermudian Salt Gatherers to the King's Agent Alexander Murray, 16 March 1790, CO 37/42/20.

<sup>109</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

head or tried to create alternative, unsanctioned ways of life.<sup>110</sup> The chapter on ‘Hydrarchy’, in particular, focuses on the relationship between sailors and the navy and merchant marine.<sup>111</sup> It frames this relationship as a battle between a maritime state operating from above, which sought to expropriate maximum labour and terrorise its subjects into submission, and a self-organising society of sailors building from below, which found its apogee in the more cooperative, democratic, and egalitarian practices of the pirate ship. Over time pirates so threatened the order and trade of the maritime state that the British Government felt compelled to brutally suppress them in the early eighteenth century. In this chapter and throughout the book, a narrative thus emerges that pitches a terroristic, domineering and capitalistic imperial state on the one hand against a democratic, cooperative, and resistant proletariat on the other – a battle whose origins began with enclosure in England. While this narrative is persuasive for Rediker and Linebaugh’s subjects of study, it does not seem to capture the dynamics of power operating within Turks Islands.

Like Rediker and Linebaugh’s hydra, those who gathered salt at Turks Islands were engaged in a fairly egalitarian, democratic, and collectivistic enterprise. Neither rich nor poor, they were merchants of a middling sort. But, unlike Rediker and Linebaugh’s hydra, they were not pitched against an imperial state that sought to annihilate their common rights. On the contrary, they were supported by this imperial state, which endorsed and helped frame their shared resource system for its own particular reasons. The Bermudian salt gatherer therefore does not fit into Rediker and Linebaugh’s revolutionary Atlantic: neither a Hydra nor a Hercules, the salt gatherer was someone in-between, operating in a space the imperial state had helped carve out for him. In an era predominantly characterised by top-down privatisation this is important to note. The salt gatherers’ way of life was not a mere leftover or a hangover of archaic tradition. Nor was it deemed especially subversive or dangerous by the imperial state. Rather, it was actively maintained and protected from the salt gatherer to the King.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-7.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, pp. 143-173.

### *The nature of bay-salt production*

Finally, there were properties specific to salt that impacted how its economy could be organised. In the scientific debates of eighteenth-century Britain, two main types of production were hotly debated: brine- or boiled salt, as favoured by Lowndes, and bay-salt, as favoured by Brownrigg. Lowndes championed a salt that could be produced by boiling down brine through a staged process, using different additives, until the solution became so saturated salt crystals formed.<sup>112</sup> It was a method of production based on a process that had been used in Britain for hundreds of years, in a more basic and simple form. Brine – salted water – was historically sourced either from seawater or extracted from natural springs.<sup>113</sup> In brine-salt production, artificial or manmade fires provided the necessary heat to encourage the evaporation of water from large iron pans filled with concentrated brine. The process took place in purpose-built ‘boiling’ houses, where furnaces, fed by coals and wood, were connected to a series of iron pans with a wall normally erected between the furnace and the pans to prevent smoke and ash dirtying the salt. Overall, brine-salt production was a tried and tested method that was conducive to the gloomier climate of Britain where rain and winter temperatures limited other forms of production.

Lowndes’ research made alterations and added stages to this established model. First, he backed a more complex process of boiling where the brine was repeatedly heated, cooled and re-heated, at different times, to different temperatures, to theoretically encourage the creation of strong large crystals. Second, he believed certain additives would help separate unwanted particles from the salt as the brine boiled. Egg whites, ale, fresh butter, and even blood were all introduced in the preparation of Lowndes’ brine-salt. The result was a more extensive and expensive method.

Lowndes’ research did carry some weight. It had, after all, received encouragement from Parliament, the Admiralty and the College of Physicians with permissions to extend further trials.<sup>114</sup> However, Brownrigg was sceptical. He suggested that while Lowndes’ methods offered improvements, his ‘method

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<sup>112</sup> Lowndes, *Brine-Salt Improved*.

<sup>113</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, pp. 49-62.

<sup>114</sup> Lowndes, *Brine-Salt Improved*, pp. 6-7, pp. 22-23, and p. 24.

of making salt for curing provisions doth not appear to be the best that may be put in practice'.<sup>115</sup> Brownrigg strongly believed that bay-salt was the most suitable for curing sea provisions. This type referred to any salt that was formed from the natural evaporation of water by the sun. Here, the sun, and not artificial fire, provided the necessary heat. As the sun encouraged the evaporation of seawater or brine, the liquid left behind became increasingly concentrated until, when fully saturated, salt crystals began to fall out of the solution. If all the water evaporated, a thick salt crust was all that was left behind. Brine-salt and bay-salt were therefore two distinctive options in Britain's eighteenth-century marketplace. Brownrigg argued more energy should be spent investigating the latter, which could produce a better curing salt at a lower cost. It was a belief shared by many of his contemporaries. Even Lowndes conceded that French bay-salt produced near La Rochelle was 'by all Merchants, Victuallers and Fishermen...universally looked upon to be the best Salt in Europe'.<sup>116</sup>

Brownrigg specified two types of bay-salt production: that which was 'drawn from the sea water; as is practised in France, Spain, Portugal and many other countries' and that which is 'extracted from salt springs, ponds and lakes; as at the Cape de Verd islands, in Africa; and at Salt-Tortuga, *Turks Island*, and many other parts of America'.<sup>117</sup> While the former was imported into Great Britain, 'our American colonies, and fisheries, in times of peace, are chiefly supplied with the latter'.<sup>118</sup> By the eve of the American Revolution, Turks Islands were producing a substantial amount of North America's salt supply, not least because its salt was widely purported to produce a curing salt that surpassed any in Europe. Time and again, its quality was emphasised. In 1766, Symmer wrote to the Secretary of State, 'the great Quantity of Salt made on Turks Islands, and its Superior Quality, to any used for curing Fish, induces numbers of People to go yearly from North America and Bermudas, during the Salt Season, for the sole purpose of making that article'.<sup>119</sup> In 1767, he wrote again, 'The Salt on these islands is deemed equal if not superior to any in the World for curing

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<sup>115</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, p. xvi.

<sup>116</sup> Lowndes, *Brine-Salt Improved*, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, p. 12. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> The National Archives, Notes on Turks Islands by the King's Agent Andrew Symmer, c. 1765, CO 23/16/149.

Fish and Salting meat, the Quantity made is considerable'.<sup>120</sup> This superiority owed much to the properties that solar-evaporated salt embodied.

Brownrigg reflected, 'it appears that various kinds of salt are used for curing provisions, but the salt which may in general be esteemed for that purpose, as preserving animal food most effectually, and for the longest time, is that which is strongest and purest'.<sup>121</sup> He clarified,

It is usually concreted into large grains or crystals, which are firm and hard, and in respect to those of other kinds of common salt, the most solid and ponderous; it is not disposed to grow soft or moist in a moderately dry air, to which it must have been exposed a considerable time; its colour is white, and somewhat diaphanous; it hath no smell; its taste is truly muriatic, and more sharpe and pungent than that of other kinds of common salt; being dissolved in pure water it casts up no scum, and deposits no sediment.<sup>122</sup>

Brownrigg had good reasons for highlighting these characteristics. Salt for sea provisions had to be able to withstand long oceanic voyages and destinations to the tropics without corruption. When large-grained, the surface area of salt was reduced, decreasing the chances of air penetrating the preserved meats and flesh, the main cause of putrefaction. Similarly, if salt was hard it was unlikely to break up and increase its surface area. Salt that was liable to moisture would dissolve, allowing air once again into the food. While taste and aesthetic appearance were of some consideration, much more important to the Admiralty and Merchant Navy was a positive affirmation of the following three characteristics: Was the salt of large grain? Did it have firm, hard crystals? Was it resistant to moisture? For Brownrigg, 'the salt which approach nighest to this degree of perfection are the best kinds of bay-salt'.<sup>123</sup> This was because salt produced by the gradual exhalation of water through the heat of the sun created larger crystals and tended to be stronger and less prone to corruption than salt extracted through rapid boiling or mining. As late as 1897, salt merchants in Turks Islands were still advertising using these favoured criteria. D F & H F Harriott, a company

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<sup>120</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King's Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Shelburne, 27 February 1767, CO 23/16/205.

<sup>121</sup> Brownrigg, *The Art of Making Common Salt*, p. 169.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, pp. 169-170.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

established in 1833, proclaimed themselves ‘Manufacturers & Shippers of Coarse & Fishery SALT. Clean and Pure, White and Dry’.<sup>124</sup>

Turks Islands were in a good position for producing this archetypal curing salt. The islands were flat, allowing for the development of large salt pans, which a hilly or mountainous topography would otherwise inhibit. Moreover, the climate was warm with relatively low levels of rainfall due to its geographical position at the southernmost tip of the Lucayan archipelago. A constant, but not fierce, trade wind encouraged the gradual exhalation of water from the salt pans. However, the production of bay-salt also had ramifications for the islands’ economic organisation. First, there were risks in salt production at Turks Islands. Fear that rain would come and ‘melt’ the salt or weaken the brine ponds was always a factor of concern. Merchant correspondence from the early 1800s includes intermittent complaints about a sudden ‘check from above’. For example, in April 1807, Captain John Lightbourn reported, ‘We have gathered about 100 bushels salt per share, and about 6 days past received a Check from above which has put us back 4 weeks’<sup>125</sup>; and again, in April 1811, ‘I have had no chance of disposing of Salt. There is a great Check on Vending of the above’.<sup>126</sup> These rainfall events, though not the norm, had severe consequences when they occurred. The islands were very small. Any event of rain near harvest time would likely destroy a significant portion of a salt crop. Holding a quantity of the ponds in common was good insurance policy. Should his crop fail, the salt gatherer at least maintained his right to a share in the profits of the general ponds.

Second, salt could not be produced all year round. In bay-salt production, the onset of winter foreshortened the length of the harvest season. By November, weather conditions for raking salt at Turks Islands were no longer suitable. These dead months at the end of the year marked a hiatus in economic activity. This

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<sup>124</sup> J Henry Pusey, *The Handbook of the Turks and Caicos Islands, being a compendium of history, statistics, and general information concerning the islands from their discovery to the present time* (Jamaica: Mortimer C DeSouza, 1897), p. 143.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood’, 29 April 1807, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 26.

<sup>126</sup> ‘Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood’, 22 April 1811, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 67.



seasonality, and the lack of alternative economic pursuits, shaped a pattern of migration that saw the majority of inhabitants leave Turks Islands from November until February. Maintaining the ponds as private property in these circumstances would have been difficult; to police, monitor and regulate the ponds when so few were present a costly and inefficient enterprise.

Finally, on average, the salt gatherer who engaged in bay-salt production required less capital for his venture than the sugar planter embarking on building an estate. This had implications for land tenure. As Nuala Zahedieh argues, ‘a sugar plantation, with its combination of industrial and agricultural operations, required a very large-scale capital investment by seventeenth-century standards’.<sup>127</sup> In the eighteenth century, Sheridan similarly reflects that ‘so large an outlay was required for Negro slaves, cattle, sugar works and utensils, that few planters were able to produce the staple that promised to yield the greatest comparative advantage’.<sup>128</sup> On average, £5,000 was needed to raise a plantation of 1,000 acres.<sup>129</sup> In Jamaica, the wealth in sugar estates, and the need to patent land, was reflected in a proliferation of surveyors ‘who by their indispensable skills...became a vital (and hitherto unrecognised) subclass of the Jamaican plantocracy’.<sup>130</sup> Through their work, estate owners became ‘sugar barons’.<sup>131</sup> The risk for capital in this industry was tangible. For every plantation that succeeded several faced bankruptcy. Such capital-intensive enterprises leant themselves to private property regimes.

In comparison, the initial outlay and risk in bay-salt production was less. Unlike the sugar or brine-salt industry, there was no need for boiling houses or expensive utensils for the extraction of bay-salt. The sun and wind performed most of the work in crystallisation. When salt was ready for raking, simple wooden rakes were used to pile it into heaps, before it was moved by hand and transported to larger vessels anchored offshore. Like a sugar plantation, enslaved labour was the single largest cost, but the skills required were less exacting and the workforce could be moved. As a result, salt raking was comparatively more

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<sup>127</sup> Zahedieh, ‘Trade, Plunder and Economic Development’, p. 208.

<sup>128</sup> Sheridan, ‘The Wealth of Jamaica’, p. 295.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Craton, ‘Review of B W Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*’, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 51 No. 1 (Mar., 1991), p. 229.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

accessible given its lower start-up costs but, by the same token, the profits to be made were not as lucrative. This combination of low risk and low reward is often a feature of shared resource systems and helps to explain why the Head Rights System suited Turks Islands: the transaction costs of enclosing the ponds and monitoring behaviour, especially in the winter dead months, simply exceeded the moderate benefits to be gained by the individual. It was more economical to place regulatory responsibility in the hands of commissioners, and support a system of mixed land tenure.

## **Conclusion**

The Head Rights System that prevailed at Turks Islands from the mid-eighteenth century was a creative, adaptive and innovative form of economic organisation within the Caribbean. It had salient features suggestive of an Atlantic transfer, but it was also a product of specific, local circumstances. While the practice of obtaining an equal share in the industry was likely informed by custom and Bermuda's tradition of land tenure, it is also clear that by the mid-eighteenth century the Crown was intervening to protect this as a common right. Yet the economic regime adopted at Turks Islands could still have been different if weather conditions had permitted salt extraction all year round or if extraction had proved capital intensive. Such interlocking factors informed the development and maintenance of a system of mixed land tenure that as much reflected early-modern European practices as it did the preferences of Bermudians, the seasonality of salt and London's interest in the trade. Like a 'creole commons', the Head Rights System thus matured out of a blend of English, Bermudian and Turks Island influences, through acts of cooperation that extended between the salt gatherers, the King's Agent and the King. In this, there was no obvious 'hydrarchy', no obvious battle that pitched the imperial state against the common salt gatherer. Nor was it merely a struggling leftover, a ghost of an older tradition. Rather, the Head Rights System was actively constructed, protected and maintained because it was important to the salt gatherer and the maritime state alike.

As a shared resource system, this was a notable departure from the plantation model. The idea that productivity should be a collective responsibility,

that a salt gatherer could obtain free rights to access an industry if he met significant obligations in return, was antithetical to the economic principles of a freehold plantation. The salt gatherers and sugar planters were not singing from the same hymn sheet and the virtues of private property, so fundamental to the sugar industry, were shunned on the saltpan. As such, the Head Rights System is significant because it demonstrates that there was still space within the British Empire for different economic models and different ways of life to coexist and flourish – and for far longer than most historical narratives would currently admit.

It remains to be said: this was no ‘Tragedy of the Commons’.<sup>132</sup> It was an effective way to deal with and fairly divide the ponds amongst a migratory population. These salt gatherers mostly journeyed from Bermuda, a place where ‘The Island... appears like, and is really, One Continued Village, there being scarcely a House in the whole Island but if a person speaks loud at the Door, he may be heard at his Neighbours’.<sup>133</sup> At Turks Islands, such close-knit ties were not cut and a sense of community endured. The Head Rights System functioned for so long because most inhabitants trusted each other and were generally willing to place regulatory powers in elected commissioners and the King’s Agent. For eighteenth-century England, Neeson has challenged the idea that common property resources are always overexploited, over-consumed and inefficiently managed by showing English commoners actually had an effective system of shared regulations, rules, customs and celebrations that bound everyone together and deterred selfish activities.<sup>134</sup> The same seems apposite for Turks Islands. On these salt islands, a community of salt gatherers existed who were consulted in the organisation of their economy and who put faith in regulations to monitor their resources effectively, all to uphold what they considered was their right: to have free and unrestrained access to the salt trade.

It was a political economy that would have remarkable longevity but, in 1845, the Head Rights System was dismantled. Chapter 6 charts that change

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<sup>132</sup> Garrett Hardin, ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, in John Baden and Garrett Hardin (eds), *Managing the Commons* (Reading: W H Freeman, 1977), pp. 16-30.

<sup>133</sup> The National Archives, Letter from (acting) King’s Agent William Miller to the Secretary of State Lord Grenville, 7 October 1789, CO 23/30 ff. 179-183.

<sup>134</sup> Neeson, *Commoners*, p. 325.

while it strives to tell a story about those who laboured within the companies of the salt gatherers: the enslaved salt rakers.

## Chapter 6: ‘Work – work – work – oh that Turk’s Island was a horrible place!’: Salt Raking in Slavery and Freedom

### Introduction

When Mary Prince was sent from Bermuda and sold to her new master at Turks Islands, she reflected it was ‘to my great joy’.<sup>1</sup> Having spent several years working for an abusive Bermudian household, the prospect of a new owner elsewhere seemed an opportunity for betterment. However, such joy was short-lived and what she would experience on the salt islands caused her severe and sustained psychological and bodily harm. In that ‘strange land’, Prince joined a form of slavery her early life in Bermuda had not prepared her for.<sup>2</sup> When she returned to Bermuda, roughly ten years later and approximately around 1812, her memories of the salt islands were lacerated with deeply negative connotations. Prince ‘was sick, sick of Turk’s Islands’, and desperate to be away from that ‘cruel, horrible place!’<sup>3</sup>

This chapter seeks to understand Prince’s recollections of Turks Islands, exploring the ways salt raking and the Head Rights System impacted her experience of salt island slavery. In so doing, it follows the calls of recent scholarship to delve into alternative spaces of slavery in non-plantation contexts; a practice that deepens our understanding of the diverse lives enslaved people lived throughout the Caribbean region.<sup>4</sup> It seeks to do this in comparison with

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave. Related by herself with a Supplement by the Editor. To which is added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa. A captured African* (ed. by Thomas Pringle, London: Westley and A H Davis, 1831) p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 12 and p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> See Verene A Shepherd, ‘Land, labour and social status: non-sugar producers in Jamaica in slavery and freedom’, in Verene Shepherd (ed.), *Working slavery pricing freedom: perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African diaspora* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002), pp. 153-178; Verene A Shepherd, *Livestock, sugar and slavery: Contested terrain in colonial Jamaica* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009); Jennifer Anderson, ‘Nature’s Currency: The Atlantic Mahogany Trade and the Commodification of Nature in the Eighteenth Century’, *Early American Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 47-80; Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Diana Paton, *No bond but the law: punishment, race, and gender in Jamaican state formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and

plantation slavery.<sup>5</sup> Like the sugar plantations, this chapter will argue that the salt industry on Turks Islands always involved ‘unfree’ labour in some way, but that there were specific aspects of salt production which defined that labour. Both in freedom and in slavery, the debilitating nature of salt raking ensured the industry only operated effectively because its labourers were literally and, later, effectively held captive. Given a viable economic alternative, a salt labourer would not willingly choose this profession. Yet the salt industry persisted and, to some degree, flourished after emancipation in 1838.

To pursue this argument, this chapter anchors itself in *The History of Mary Prince*, with supplementary evidence from slave registers, merchant correspondence and colonial office records. Prince’s *History* was published in London and Edinburgh in 1831 and was a bestseller, going through three print runs in its first year. While all slave narratives are mediated documents, Prince’s *History* remains of great historical value.<sup>6</sup> Prince was born in Brackish Pond, Bermuda, where she spent her childhood years in domestic slavery alongside her mother and several brothers and sisters. They were enslaved to a seafaring family, where the husband was often at sea, leaving behind a wife and daughter. For Prince, ‘This was the happiest period of my life; for I was too young to understand rightly my condition as a slave, and too thoughtless and full of spirits to look forward to the days of toil and sorrow’.<sup>7</sup> However, her life within a caring family unit was not to last. Prince was sold to two further, much crueller, mistresses and masters before she was shipped to Turks Islands where she spent ten years of her life, during her early twenties. Her *History* provides the only

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Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For a proponent of the comparative methodology, see David Brion Davis, ‘Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105 No. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 452-466.

<sup>6</sup> For studies that debate the utility and veracity of Mary Prince’s slave narrative, see Janice Schroeder, “‘Narrat[ing] Some Poor Little Fable’: Evidence of Bodily Pain in The History of Mary Prince and “Wife-Torture in England””, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (Fall, 2004), pp. 261-281; Kremena Todorova, “‘I Will Say the Truth to the English People’: The History of Mary Prince and the Meaning of English History”, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 43 No. 3 (Fall, 2001), pp. 285-302; Barbara Baumgartner, ‘The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration and Appropriation in The History of Mary Prince’, *Callaloo*, Vol. 24 No. 1 (Winter, 2001), pp. 253-275; and Margot Maddison-MacFadyen, ‘Mary Prince, Grand Turk, and Antigua’, *Slavery & Abolition* (Nov., 2012), pp. 1-10.

<sup>7</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 1.

account historians have of Turks Islands written from the perspective of an enslaved salt raker. At Turks Islands, slavery had begun to replace free white labour on the ponds from the mid-eighteenth century, once the Crown had asserted its sovereignty (see Chapter 7) and the Head Rights System had been formally encoded (see Chapter 5). While we can only speculate what salt island slavery in the late eighteenth century may have been like, Prince's *History* provides a good indication and is the most authentic account available. This chapter therefore uses it to stand in for salt island slavery across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

For the purpose of this chapter, Prince's *History* provides an invaluable, irreplaceable source of detail on the daily experiences of salt raking that cannot be deduced elsewhere. It affords a much-needed correlative to the relatively abundant material that is available for the salt gatherers while serving as an important reminder: that behind every statistic of salt raking, there was a thinking, breathing, feeling human being carrying out the work. And, finally, by addressing salt labour practices that changed little after 1838, Prince's narrative acts as a bridge between slavery and freedom.

### **Salt island slavery**

Salt raking was not the only occupation for enslaved persons at Turks Islands. In the Slave Register of Returns in 1834, 21.4 per cent of the enslaved population at Turks Islands were designated non-effective, 2.8 per cent were field labourers, and 16.3 per cent were involved in domestic employment (see Figure 6.1). However, the majority – 52.7 per cent – were variously designated as 'in the cultivation of salt' or had dual occupations whose primary employment was similarly assigned. This section will explore what life on Turks Islands may have been like for these enslaved salt rakers. To do this, it will examine the ramifications of working with(in) salt, the implications of labouring in a precociously modern industry, the challenges posed by the white creole culture, the scope of Turks Islands' slave economy, and the options available for *marronage* in these saline spaces.

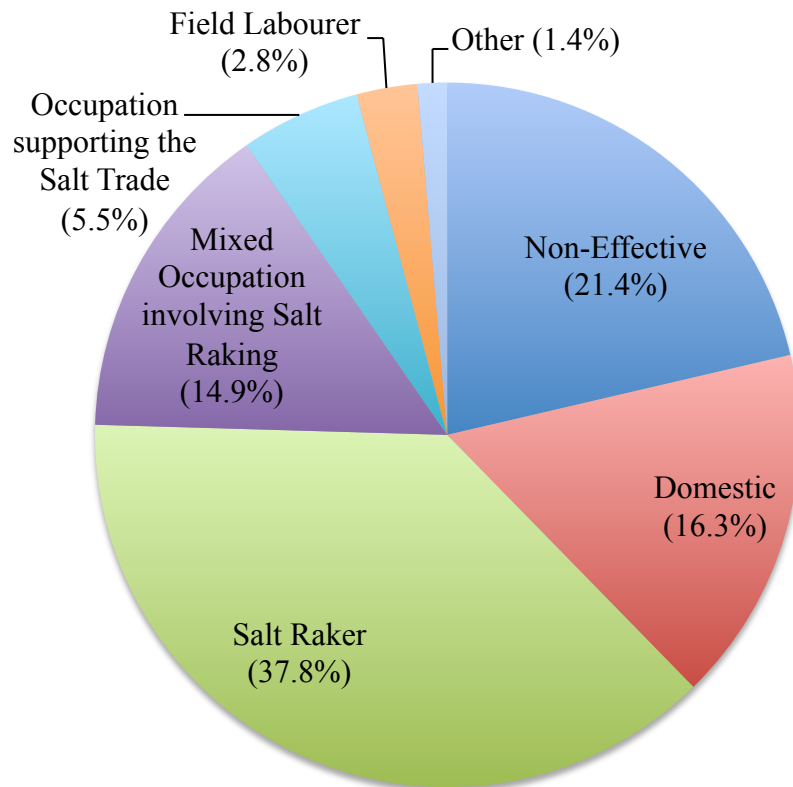


Figure 6.1: A pie chart showing the distribution of enslaved persons in different modes of employment at Turks Islands, July 1834. This data has been compiled from The National Archives, Slave Register of Returns for the Bahamas, July 1834, T 71/460.

### *Working with(in) salt*

Prince's account of toiling in the ponds sheds light on the working lives of over half of Turks Islands' enslaved population and she makes it clear: if scholars wish to understand the challenges posed by salt island slavery, they must pay attention to the *salt raker's body* and *the nature of salt itself*.

As noted in Chapter 1, from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, salt was used to preserve vegetables, fleshy meat and fish within Europe's maritime empires. Salt was able to do so because its crystals drew out moisture while creating an environment that was inhospitable for most bacteria, fungi and other potentially harmful organisms to live. This also had implications for a salt raker's skin. Skin that was repeatedly exposed to concentrated brine physically transformed and became prone to cracking, bleeding and infection. Prince's account illuminates these painful conditions. Prince 'was given a half



barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to [her] knees in the water' for hours on end, encouraging salt crystals to form and raking it into mounds.<sup>8</sup> This she did from dawn until dusk, stopping only for a rushed meagre breakfast and lunch. From 'standing in the salt water for so many hours', Prince noted the injurious effects: 'Our feet and legs...soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment'.<sup>9</sup> To mitigate salt's worst effects, after the working day the enslaved labourers 'went down to the sea, where we washed the pickle from our limbs'.<sup>10</sup> This daily toil exposed a constant battle between Prince and her environment. As Barbara Baumgartner states, 'in [Prince's] description, the external surroundings are given more agency than her body, which appears unable to resist, incapable of self-defence, acted upon and destroyed by the water and the sun'.<sup>11</sup> Here, salt was an agent with a power to adversely affect shovels, barrows and bodies alike. Echoes of sore and swollen feet rise up from the slave registers: Robert Smith recorded a female, Doll, aged 45, suffering from 'swollen feet'; Benjamin Wood recorded Rachael, aged 55, labouring 'with a sore foot'; and Henshall Stubbs recorded enslaved male, Tom, aged 56, 'labouring under sore foot'.<sup>12</sup>

These acute injuries became chronic on a saltpan because there was never adequate time for recovery. On 'rest' days, Prince and her fellow labourers could not escape the corrosive nature of Turks Islands' environment. Bodily injury impacted all hours of a salt raker's life, keeping enslaved persons awake at night and preventing their bodies from experiencing the healing effect of a good night's sleep. Prince recounted,

On Sundays, after we had washed the salt bags, and done other work required of us, we went into the bush and cut the long soft grass, of which we made trusses for our legs and feet to rest upon, for they were so full of salt boils that we could get no rest lying on the bare boards.<sup>13</sup>

Here Prince reveals the disjuncture between her physical pain and the lack of provisioning available to ameliorate her discomfort. Not only were her exposed

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<sup>8</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Baumgartner, 'The Body as Evidence', p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> The National Archives, Slave Register of Returns for the Bahamas, July 1834, T 71/460.

<sup>13</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

feet ‘full of salt boils’ but the only bedding she was provided with were ‘boards, fixed upon stakes driven into the ground, without mat or covering’ in a ‘long shed, divided into narrow slips’.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, she was unable to sleep adequately. While Sunday may superficially have been a ‘rest’ day (the Royal Regulations did stipulate, ‘No Person whatever, shall work in any of the Pans or Ponds, or wheel Salt on Sundays’<sup>15</sup>), chores linked to the salt industry consistently encroached on this ‘free’ time. Sometimes, Prince ‘had to work all night measuring salt to load a vessel; or turning a machine to draw water out of the sea for salt making’.<sup>16</sup> The resultant fatigue did not prevent tasks the following day. Rather, ‘then we had no sleep – no rest – but were forced to work as fast as we could and go on all next day the same as usual’.<sup>17</sup> As one of the body’s essential healing functions, sleep deprivation on this scale was unhealthy, physically and psychologically.

The salt environment also caused sightlessness. Prince was called to work in the ponds ‘through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire’.<sup>18</sup> While the heat caused ‘salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered’, the glare contributed to long-term eyesight problems.<sup>19</sup> Unlike field labourers on sugar plantations, saltpan workers had to cope with a heightened ‘exposure to sunlight, reflected from both the surface of the brine and from the surface of the salt crystals’.<sup>20</sup>

Figures 6.2 and 6.3, although of a later period, provide a visual impression of this brilliantly white, oppressive landscape, where straw-woven hats protected the face from the sun above but not from the glare below. In the appendix to Prince’s narrative, her editor states, ‘since the First Edition of this Tract was published, Mary Prince has been afflicted in the eyes, which, it is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The National Archives, The Royal Regulations, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 134-137.

<sup>16</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Murli L Mathur, Kripa Ram Haldiya, Raman Sachdev and Habibulla N Saiyed, ‘The risk of pterygium in salt workers’, *International Ophthalmology*, Vol. 26 (Feb., 2005), pp. 43-47.



Figure 6.2: Photograph of salt raking, c. 1900. From Mike Nash, 'White Gold: How Salt Made and Unmade the Turks and Caicos Islands', *History*, 14 December 2012. <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/white-gold-how-salt-made-and-unmade-the-turks-and-caicos-islands-161576195>> (13 August 2017).



Figure 6.3: Photograph of salt raking, c. 1900. From Turks and Caicos National Museum, 'Salt Raking in the TCI', *Culture & History*, 2017. <<https://www.tcmuseum.org/culture-history/salt-industry/>> (13 August 2017).

feared, may terminate in total blindness'.<sup>21</sup> In the slave registers, enslaved persons were also listed as being 'non-effective' because of blindness. For example, David Bethell recorded Tom as 'Non-effective, blind'.<sup>22</sup> David Francis Eve recorded David as 'Non-effective, blind since 1827'.<sup>23</sup> While not conclusive, it is likely such eyesight problems were compounded, if not created, by conditions on the salt pans.

This sustained physical assault had implications for identity. Evocative of Barbara Duden's body theory in *The Women beneath the Skin*, Prince's flesh refused to act as a barrier between her inner self and the outer world, but became infected and permeable, letting the outside in and leaving her psychologically vulnerable.<sup>24</sup> As Michele Speitz puts it, 'Prince's text records how lethal amounts of salt seep through the skin, forging a visceral, literal and grotesque union between salt, the commodified substance, and the slave, the commodified worker'.<sup>25</sup> This seepage would later impact how Prince evaluated key life-events.<sup>26</sup> In *The story of pain*, Joanna Bourke convincingly argues that 'being-in-pain' is an event, which gains meaning through evaluation.<sup>27</sup> The sensual event itself – the salt blister, the boil, the blindness – may not be inherently painful, but it becomes painful when the sufferer evaluates it according to their previous experiences and personal, cultural and societal beliefs. In her *History*, Prince evaluates Turks Islands in comparison to her life in Bermuda as a domestic enslaved labourer, which did not prepare her for work on the saltpan; and she raises salt as an agent, giving it a power that rivalled, if not surpassed, her master's. Salt became a powerful, existential marker and a form of 'retrojection'

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself. With a supplement by the Editor. To which is added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa. A captured African* (ed. by Thomas Pringle, 3rd edn, London, 1831), p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> The National Archives, Slave Register of Returns for the Bahamas, July 1834, T 71/460.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: a doctor's patients in eighteenth-century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Michele Speitz, 'Blood Sugar and Salt Licks: Corroding Bodies and Preserving Nations in *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*', *Circulations: Romanticism and the Black Atlantic*, October 2011. < <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.speitz.html> > (10 June 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Bourke, *The story of pain: from prayer to painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 13.

took place.<sup>28</sup> This is evidenced in the way salt entered Prince's lexicon. As she evaluated her experiences, she used salt's flavour profile to describe and give meaning to important, poignant and catastrophic moments of her life. For example, when Prince was sold and separated from her family in Bermuda she cried, 'oh the trials! the trials! they make *the salt water* come into my eyes'.<sup>29</sup> To describe tears as salt water, and equate emotional pain with salt, is a charged metaphor. It was not coincidental.

Moreover, one of salt's accompaniments, cayenne, was similarly used to convey emotional pain. When Prince was appraised by her potential buyers, 'their light words *fell like cayenne* on the fresh wounds of our hearts'.<sup>30</sup> This language of seasoning echoed real punishment practices observed at Turks Islands. There, Prince recalled how her master beat 'poor Daniel...with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw' and then called for 'a bucket of salt and *flung it upon the raw flesh* till the man writhed on the ground like a worm'.<sup>31</sup> In evaluating these events, Prince 'frame[d] her existence through the lens of salt'.<sup>32</sup>

Yet if Prince used savoury seasonings to represent her worst memories, she used their opposite to describe positive ideas and desires. Sugar and sweetness became the representation of all things good. Twice in her narrative Prince compared sweetness with freedom, using the phrase 'to be free is very sweet'.<sup>33</sup> At the end of her narrative, Prince chastised anyone who believed enslaved persons did not want to be free by stating forcefully: 'It is not so. All slaves want to be free – to be free is very sweet'.<sup>34</sup> In so doing, Prince cast particular flavour profiles with different metaphorical meanings leaving salt without any redemptive qualities. As Speitz has remarked, 'her text displays not one kind word devoted to the world of the savoury'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Bourke defines retrojection as 'the means by which ways of naming pain circulating within a society are mapped back into the body'. Or, as anthropologist Michael Kimmel describes, retrojection is 'the process by which metaphors as well as bodily images and symbols "come to be felt inside the body"'.  
<sup>29</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 5.  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 4. Italics added for emphasis.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 11. Italics added for emphasis.  
<sup>32</sup> Speitz, 'Blood Sugar and Salt Licks'.  
<sup>33</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 18 and p. 23.  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 23.  
<sup>35</sup> Speitz, 'Blood Sugar and Salt Licks'.

In part, this was because salt raking did not provide a restorative to its labourers as harvesting sugar cane did. Many physicians noted how, despite the brutal demands of the cane harvest, field labourers developed a ‘peculiar glossiness of the skin, so indicative of health [which] is never seen to the same extent at any other season’.<sup>36</sup> In Jamaica, Bryan Edwards remarked, ‘The Time in crop in the Sugar Islands is the season of gladness and festivity to man and beast. So palatable, salutary, and nourishing is the juice of the cane, drinking freely of it derives health and vigour’.<sup>37</sup> The intensity of the sugar harvest was relentless, but it did permit relatively nutritious consumption. No such ameliorative existed in the salt ponds. Salt did not provide any satisfaction to Prince both during and after raking. Indeed, her only reference to consuming salt was medicinal and even then it seemed a punishment. When the enslaved labourers were taken ill, they were given hot salted water to drink. Far from curing them, this ‘made [them] very sick’.<sup>38</sup>

The salt raker’s body therefore had a particularly abusive relationship with salt, reflected in Prince’s ‘obsessive focus on the physical’ while at Turks Islands.<sup>39</sup> The Head Rights System was organised around the production of a commodity that had specific and sadistic effects on those who were forced to rake it. These effects would outlast slavery.

### *Working in a precociously modern industry*

The enslaved body also laboured under an intense work regimen imposed by the slavery system, which had features of a precociously modern cast. In Caribbean historiography, many historians have argued the sugar plantations were proto-industrial, a ‘modernity that predated the modern’.<sup>40</sup> Sidney Mintz, in particular, has long placed emphasis on the combination of ‘factory and field’, which

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<sup>36</sup> Physician quoted in Kenneth Kiple and Virginia Kiple, ‘Deficiency Diseases in the Caribbean’, in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds), *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1991), p. 176.

<sup>37</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (3 vols, 4th edn, London: John Stockdale, 1807), 2, p. 259.

<sup>38</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Baumgartner, ‘The Body as Evidence’, p. 257.

<sup>40</sup> David Scott, ‘Modernity that Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz’s Caribbean’, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 58 No. 1 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 191-210.

typified sugar production.<sup>41</sup> While salt production did not involve the same combination of manufacturing and agriculture, this did not prevent the growth of other proto-industrial features.

For instance, there was a comparatively modern sense of time-discipline at Turks Islands. This was driven in part by salt's natural rhythms and in part by technology. On the sugar islands, the need to process sugar cane within forty-eight hours of the plant being cut drove a particularly vigorous work regimen during harvest time. Similarly, on the salt islands, fear that rain would 'melt' the salt, or that the onset of winter was near, drove a notably intense schedule of work during the salt season. Both in sugar and salt production, a distinct seasonality meant labour demands were constantly in flux around harvest season.

Moreover, in the American South, Mark Smith has argued that planters and enslaved persons increasingly understood the clock-face as the legitimate arbiter of time rather than the previous pre-modern, nature-based conceptions.<sup>42</sup> Bell towers were erected on estates to ring in the working day and wristwatches were purchased for planters and overseers to keep track of time. Prince's narrative reflects this trend by revealing a keen sense of time punctuality at Turks Islands. Though the natural world determined the seasonality of salt and the limits of the diurnal working day, within that working day there was a modern time-schedule. Prince had to,

...stand up to my knees in the water from *four o'clock* in the morning till *nine*, when we were given some Indian corn boiled in water, which we were obliged to swallow as fast as we could... We were then called again to our tasks... We came home at *twelve*; ate our corn soup, called blawly, as fast as we could, and went back to our employment till dark at night.<sup>43</sup>

These time references strongly suggest Prince's overseer had access to a timepiece in order to orchestrate the regimen of the working day. Towards the end of slavery, a gaol was erected on Grand Turk, which had a bell tower. J Henry Pusey called this bell the 'Public Time-Keeper' and it was rung five times

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<sup>41</sup> Sidney W Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> Mark M Smith, *Mastered by the clock: time, slavery, and freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10. Italics added for emphasis.

a day.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Prince indicates that overseers were preoccupied with strict timekeeping, fearing lost time. During her breaks she was obliged to eat her food ‘as fast as [she] could’ and in her examples of punishment, often the crime was the labourer not moving fast enough.<sup>45</sup> ‘Poor Daniel’ was punished because he ‘could not keep up with the rest of the slaves’.<sup>46</sup> An old woman called Sarah was punished because she ‘did not wheel the barrow fast enough to please’.<sup>47</sup> Prince herself was punished ‘for not being able to move so fast as he [the master] wished me’.<sup>48</sup> This attention to time-discipline drove an intense, strict and modern schedule of work.

There was also a modern division of labour. As Gail Saunders relates, ‘Turks Island was one of the only islands [in the Bahamas] with “gangs” of slaves’.<sup>49</sup> Due to the intensity of the salt harvest, gangs were needed to rake salt efficiently from the ponds. On eighteenth-century Jamaican sugar plantations, gang systems were the norm. Field labourers tended to be separated into three gangs according to their age and strength, which ‘raised plantation outcrop by increasing the intensity of labour’.<sup>50</sup> For historians such as Mintz, David Eltis, Russell Menard and Susan Dwyer Amussen, the slave gang was a sign of things to come in industrial Europe.<sup>51</sup> Certainly it was the most intense form of labour yet seen in the western world.

In Turks Islands, this division of labour was apparent: of the 474 enslaved persons employed in salt raking in 1834, 63 per cent were male, the

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<sup>44</sup> J Henry Pusey, *The Handbook of the Turks and Caicos Islands, being a compendium of history, statistics, and general information concerning the islands from their discovery to the present time* (Jamaica: Mortimer C DeSouza, 1897), p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Gail Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas 1648-1838* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1985), p. 82.

<sup>50</sup> Russell R Menard, ‘Plantation Empire: How Sugar and Tobacco Planters Built Their Industries and Raised an Empire’, *Agricultural History*, Vol. 81 No. 3 (Summer, 2007), p. 321.

<sup>51</sup> A comprehensive overview of the relevant literature can be found in Christer Petley, ‘New Perspectives on Slavery and Emancipation in the British Caribbean’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 54 No. 3 (Sept., 2011), pp. 855-880. See also David Eltis, ‘The Slave Economies of the Caribbean: Structure, Performance, Evolution and Significance’, in Franklin W Knight (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean, Volume III: The slave societies of the Caribbean* (6 vols, London: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Education Ltd, 1997), 3, p. 124.



average age was 32, and they were overwhelmingly black and creole.<sup>52</sup> Salt raking was clearly gendered and racialised, with slaveholders preferring fit, young, black, male creoles. Moreover, these gangs contained hierarchies. Within the slave registers, several were listed with supervisory roles. For example, John Eve had fourteen enslaved persons in the ponds including Jack who was a ‘Driver’.<sup>53</sup> These elite enslaved labourers worked alongside white overseers to apportion tasks depending on the time of year and condition of their companies. Following the salt season, Prince recalls that her gang was ‘sent to South Creek, with large bills, to cut mangoes to burn lime with’ while another gang was ‘sent to the other side of the island to break up coral out of the sea’.<sup>54</sup> As ever, ‘if we could not keep up with the rest of the gang of slaves, we were put in the stocks, and severely flogged the next morning’.<sup>55</sup>

Strict time-discipline coupled with gang labour created a notoriously intense, supervised and regimented work schedule at Turks Islands. Prince’s impression was summed up in three words: ‘work – work – work’.<sup>56</sup> It was labour intensive; it was arduous; and it brought real corporeal and psychological change to the enslaved body. The Head Rights System depended on it because in a limited salt season, when the risk of rainfall threatened to destroy a harvest, this regime ensured maximum productivity and minimal loss of profits.

### *The white creole culture*

Larger societal forces also created specific challenges for enslaved salt rakers. Prince was keen to highlight that a corrupt white creole culture existed, which allowed masters to punish with impunity beyond official oversight. In the British Caribbean, David Lambert has shown that white creole identities were an important ‘site of struggle’ during the abolition era.<sup>57</sup> Abolitionists sought to create a moral distance between metropolitan inhabitants and their colonial

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<sup>52</sup> Data compiled from The National Archives, Slave Register of Returns for the Bahamas, July 1834, T 71/460.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 2.

counterparts in order to galvanise support for their cause and demonise their opponents. Consequently, white creoles were often portrayed as corrupt, indecent, violent and un-British seigniors who treated their enslaved labourers dispassionately. Simultaneously, white creoles fought to maintain their status in these debates as quintessentially, benevolent British gentlemen of peaceful, organised agricultural estates. In these disputes, notions of gender, race and religion often surfaced. At Turks Islands, we hear these debates refracted frequently in the early 1800s, and they are interesting for what they might suggest about daily practices.

In 1811, Methodist missionary William Dowson arrived at Turks Islands and spent two months there on route to his post in Nassau. He arrived on Christmas Day and was introduced to the Reverend Thomas Dalziel, a Presbyterian clergyman who was ‘about 70 years old, lately married to a young woman of about 22. I thought he was in liquor’.<sup>58</sup> A few days later, Dowson commented disapprovingly, ‘the house in which I reside has been a place of rendezvous the week of Christmas and this evening’s merriment crowns all the rest’.<sup>59</sup> When he returned from an evening out, ‘the hall floor was covered with spirituous and broken glasses, but’ – significantly – ‘*the bucks and bloods* were fled’.<sup>60</sup> In *The London Magazine* in 1755, ‘the characteristick of the Buck and Blood’ included ‘playing the most wild and extravagant pranks that wantonness and debauchery can suggest’ while ‘sally[ing] out “flown with insolence and wine”’.<sup>61</sup> Given that ‘whatever is in violation of all decency and order is an exquisite piece of wit’, their antics could involve ‘a tour of the principal bawdy-houses’, ‘breaking of lamps and skirmishes with watchmen’, ‘insulting...dull sober fools’, and ‘a rape on a modest woman’.<sup>62</sup> These negative connotations coat Dowson’s commentary on the local white creole. While Dowson surveyed

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Journal Entry of William Dowson’, 25 December 1811, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson’s Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), pp. 36-37.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Journal Entry of William Dowson’, 1 January 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson’s Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> The Connoisseur, ‘Frolicks of BUCKS and BLOODS’, *The London Magazine*, 6 February 1755, p. 69.  
<<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021267748;view=1up;seq=87>> (12 August 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

the room, 'Wymms soon came in drunk and apologised for the state of the house adding, "it is the ending up of Christmas"''.<sup>63</sup> Later, as Dowson lay in bed, 'a drunken rake came and knicked against the ceiling of my chamber and cursed me heartily'.<sup>64</sup> Dowson's worst fears of Dalziel came true when he was found to 'drink to excess the week through and preaches once on the Sabbath'.<sup>65</sup> After a month's residence, Dowson lamented, 'I am surrounded by persons who fear not God' in a place where 'wickedness overspreads the islands of the sea'.<sup>66</sup> A missionary from Bermuda sympathised in a letter, 'Turks Island is, I believe, a very wicked place'.<sup>67</sup>

Prince emphasised this 'wickedness' with examples of the corrupt practices of those who ruled at Turks Islands. For one, she contrasted her own feeling self with her new master's coldness: 'Mr. D— was usually quite calm. He would stand by and give orders to be cruelly whipped, and assist in the punishment, without moving a muscle of his face, walking about, and taking snuff with the greatest composure'.<sup>68</sup> She then narrates a number of punishment practices. There was an enslaved person called Ben, caught stealing some rice, who was 'hung up when we came home; with a pool of blood beneath him, and our master still licking him';<sup>69</sup> and Sarah, an old woman suffering from 'several bodily infirmities and [who] was not quite right in the head', who was beaten and 'flung...among the prickly-pear bushes, which are covered over with sharp venomous prickles'.<sup>70</sup> Sarah 'was so grievously wounded, that her body swelled

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<sup>63</sup> 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 1 January 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), pp. 37-38.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 19 January 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 27 January 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 39. 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 13 January 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 38.

<sup>67</sup> 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 15 February 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 41.

<sup>68</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

and festered all over'.<sup>71</sup> Sarah died a few days later. The law at Turks Islands did not protect these labourers. According to Saunders, before the first quarter of the nineteenth century, masters under Bahamian jurisdiction could do much 'as they pleased'.<sup>72</sup> Before 1824, there was no restriction on how many lashes could be inflicted.<sup>73</sup> Prince herself experienced this punishment on multiple occasions:

Mr. D— has often stripped me naked, hung me up by the wrists, and beat me with a cow-skin; with his own hand, till my body was raw with gashes. Yet there was nothing very remarkable in this; for it might serve as common useage on that horrid island.<sup>74</sup>

Testimonies at the end of her narrative confirmed the extent of her scarring. Four (white) certified witnesses corroborated that, 'the whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, chequered with the vestiges of severe floggings'.<sup>75</sup> The fact these practices were questioned and Prince's editor received 'inquiries...from various quarters respecting the existence of marks of severe punishment on Mary Prince's body' reveal the disconnect that existed between the colonies and the metropole.<sup>76</sup> Prince understood this and sought to close the gap.

However, as Paul Farnsworth demonstrates, the inhabitants of Turks Islands were in a remarkably remote location.<sup>77</sup> Though the salt industry was regulated, these regulations safeguarded the trade but offered little protection to the enslaved. For legal protection, the islands fell under Bahamian slave codes and while Bahamian records generally bespeak of mild punishments, Saunders has pointed out 'probably more cruelty existed than was ever recorded...on the Out Islands which were so cut off by bad communications'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the courts of justice were rarely referred to. In 1803, the King's Agent declared that 'the privilege of resorting to the Courts of Justice at New Providence' had been utilised by the inhabitants of Turks Islands 'in only one instance within 20

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, p. 159.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (3rd edn), p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Farnsworth, 'The Influence of Trade on Bahamian Slave Culture', *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 30. No. 4 (1996), pp. 1-23.

<sup>78</sup> Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, p. 160.

years'.<sup>79</sup> More cases were heard at Bermuda's courts of justice, but overall this limited courtroom activity was not because crimes and abuse did not exist at Turks Islands. It was because the Bahamas and Bermuda Governments were located over 500 miles away. Travelling to both entailed time and expense. More likely matters simply did not reach court but were resolved *in situ* between wronged parties or by the King's Agent and his commissioners. However, these colonial actors possessed shares in the ponds and consequently a personal interest in supporting the *status quo*. Such poor juridical channels compromised the ability of enslaved persons to seek redress while shoring up potentially unlawful practices.

The remote location of Turks Islands and its lack of magisterial oversight therefore created a white creole culture that permitted salt gatherers to govern the islands' enslaved population with relative impunity. When coupled with the harsh environmental conditions and intense work regimen, it is clear a system of domination had developed at Turks Islands that relied on violence to achieve maximum productivity.

#### *The internal domestic economy*

A corrupt white creole culture ensured that *things could be done to enslaved persons* at Turks Islands, which were not permissible in other colonial settings. Yet, there were also *things enslaved persons could not do* at Turks Islands, which impacted daily life.

Unlike Jamaica and Barbados, there was little land available for domestic provisioning. In his study of two plantations in Barbados, Justin Roberts has shown how an agricultural technique called 'cane-holeing' allowed provisions to be intercropped amongst sugar cane fields, challenging 'the notion that large-scale provision production had to be abandoned when planters filled their fields with sugar'.<sup>80</sup> Rather, this 'full-blown sugar island' was actually able to meet

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<sup>79</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Lords of His Majesty's Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>80</sup> Justin Roberts, 'Working between the Lines: Labour and Agriculture on Two Barbadian Sugar Plantations, 1796-97', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 63 No. 3 (Jul., 2006), p. 585.

most of its population's calorie intake.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in the late seventeenth century, Eltis found that Jamaica and Barbados were producing three-quarters of their calorie intake, prompting him to argue that 'if neither of these islands relied on food imports, it is unlikely that any other part of the Caribbean did so'.<sup>82</sup> Yet that *is* what happened at Turks Islands.

Time and again visitors commented on the infertility of Turks Islands' soil. When passing through the islands in 1804, Daniel McKinnen observed 'the soil, which is sandy, admits but of little cultivation, and produces only a small quantity of Guinea corn'.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Dowson noticed how 'the soil of these islands is remarkably sterile' and even used it in a rather striking metaphor: 'most of the inhabitants of the island seem as barren of moral goodness as the soil on which they live'.<sup>84</sup> The very existence of salt ponds on these small, flat islands meant the soil's nutritional value was easily exhausted.

Captain John Lightbourn must have been one of the few salt gatherers who could cultivate a few acres of provisions. In 1811, he wrote to his nephew in Bermuda: 'I thank fortune I am feeding my Negroes with Corn and Pumpkins of my own raising, and can hold out for three months'.<sup>85</sup> However, this language of 'holding out' adequately describes his precarious position. Nothing was secure when it came to food. Despite his few acres, Lightbourn regularly reported the scarcity of provisions. In November 1806, he wrote, 'Provisions are very scarce, not one Bushel of Corn on the Island for sale and many people not a morsel of Bread'.<sup>86</sup> And in October 1807, he wrote again, 'we are likely to perish on these Islands. There is not now provision that will feed us three weeks nor any

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Eltis, 'The Slave Economies of the Caribbean', p. 111.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel McKinnen, *Tour through the British West Indies, in the years 1802 and 1803, giving a particular account of The Bahama Islands* (London: R Taylor, 1804), pp. 124-125.

<sup>84</sup> 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 10 February 1812, in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 40. 'Journal Entry of William Dowson', 1 January 1812', in Dean Peggs (ed.), *Dowson's Journal for 1810-1817: A Mission to the West India Islands* (Nassau: The Dean Peggs Research Fund, 1960), p. 37.

<sup>85</sup> 'Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood', 22 April 1811, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> 'Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood', 28 November 1806, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 21.

alternative for us. We have frequent deaths'.<sup>87</sup> These cyclical crises affected both the free and enslaved population. Several of Lightbourn's friends and relatives died from starvation. However, because the enslaved were toiling through the heat of the day, their need for sustenance was acute. To be 'a long time on Short Commons' at 'a 3rd of [their normal] allowance' put their health in jeopardy.<sup>88</sup> Prince only ever recalled having guinea corn to eat: for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This lack of variation, if sustained, would have produced vitamin deficiencies. Coupled with the arduous work, it is little wonder that Turks Islands had one of the highest death rates in the Bahamas.<sup>89</sup>

Inadequate domestic provisioning had additional socioeconomic implications. Whereas Jamaica could support a provision ground system that gave enslaved persons more economic and social autonomy, no provision grounds could exist at Turks Islands. Consequently, there was an underdeveloped domestic economy and internal marketing system. In Jamaica, Edward Long estimated that enslaved people held one fifth of all money in circulation in the 1770s.<sup>90</sup> But in Turks Islands, not only was cash scarce (Lightbourn insisted, 'we are poor, no cash in circulation'<sup>91</sup>), but also the means of credit – salt – was prevented from falling into the hands of the islands' enslaved population. The Royal Regulations affirmed, 'No Servant or Slave shall be allowed to work for themselves in any of the Ponds or Pans'.<sup>92</sup> While it was not impossible to obtain goods for barter and exchange, these regulatory barriers restricted the enslaved person's purchasing power.

As a result, enslaved persons in these remote, infertile islands were more dependent upon their masters for essential and luxury goods. Farnsworth has demonstrated that, within the Bahaman distribution system, Turks Islands lacked

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<sup>87</sup> 'Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood', 11 March 1807, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 25.

<sup>88</sup> 'Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood', 20 October 1807, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 32.

<sup>89</sup> Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Eltis, 'The Slave Economies of the Caribbean', p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> 'Letter from John Lightbourn to William Astwood', 13 February 1812, in Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), p. 71.

<sup>92</sup> The National Archives, The Royal Regulations, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 134-137.

regular access to Nassau, the main mercantile hub.<sup>93</sup> Merchant vessels rarely called at Turks Islands except to collect salt. The result was a limited proliferation of goods concentrated into the hands of the slaveholding class. Prince reiterates this dependency: in the morning ‘we *were given* some Indian corn boiled in water’, and at night ‘when we returned to the house, our master *gave us* each our allowance of raw Indian corn’.<sup>94</sup> Everything Prince ate was given from her master. This underdeveloped domestic economy hindered the growth of Sunday markets and an internal slave economy that typified eighteenth-century Jamaica.

At Turks Islands, the lack of arable land was always going to hamper the social and economic autonomy of the enslaved population. However, the Head Rights System made this considerably more difficult when it prohibited enslaved salt rakers from being in possession of the islands’ one tradable commodity: salt. In such a harsh saline environment with intense labour conditions, violent punishment practices, and limited opportunities for economic and social autonomy, many enslaved salt rakers would have dreamt of escape.

### *Marronage*

Opportunities to abscond, however, were severely abridged at Turks Islands, especially in comparison to the larger, more mountainous Caribbean islands. Turks Islands were tiny: Grand Turk was ten square miles and Salt Key was four square miles; there was no jungle interior, or any significant interior at all, in which to hide. The nearest islands were Caicos Islands, but Cockburn Harbour was still almost forty-one kilometres away, wider than the English Channel.

Moreover, *marronage* was strictly monitored. The Royal Regulations stipulated that ‘No person...shall be allowed a Share for any Servant or Slave, after an Absence of forty-eight Hours of such servant or slave’.<sup>95</sup> According to Bahamian law, an enslaved person was not a runaway until they had been absent for ten days.<sup>96</sup> At Turks Islands, that time was foreshortened to two days.

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<sup>93</sup> Farnsworth, ‘The Influence of Trade’, p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> The National Archives, The Royal Regulations, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 134-137.

<sup>96</sup> Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, p. 80.



Exceptions were made for those employed in seafaring activities, but for the majority this regulation severely restricted their mobility. While it was common for planters in Barbados and Jamaica to tolerate *petit marronage* as an ‘institutionalised pressure valve’, the salt gatherers had more to lose.<sup>97</sup> After an enslaved person was absent for forty-eight hours, their master forfeited their share for the rest of the season. No regulation in the sugar islands correspondingly caused a planter to give up an equivalent share of his estate for a runaway enslaved labourer. This regulation therefore put considerable responsibility on the shoulders of slaveholders to deter runaways. Discipline was consequently, predictably exacting, and slaveholders could take decisive measures: from April 1832 to March 1834, Henshall Stubbs furnished one of his own boats to patrol the coasts.<sup>98</sup>

Despite such restrictions, enslaved persons did attempt to flee. In the Bahamian archipelago, ‘the majority of slaves running away were from the Turks and Caicos Islands’.<sup>99</sup> Between 1822 and 1825, ‘of the 142 slaves listed as runaways, 128 absconded from Turks Island’.<sup>100</sup> Saunders attributes this to the prevalence of the gang system, which allowed enslaved persons to congregate in larger numbers, and to the relative proximity of nearby Saint Domingue, which was evermore attractive after its independence in 1804.<sup>101</sup> In the slave registers, traces of these runaways can be found. In 1834, William Adams recorded that two enslaved persons, David and Isaac, had ‘eloped the 3rd March 1832 in a pilot boat for St Domingue’.<sup>102</sup> Benjamin Coverly reported that Joe ‘eloped to St Domingo in 1832’.<sup>103</sup> Finally, Saint George Duncan Tucker reported that Romeo had ‘eloped to St Domingo in 1832’.<sup>104</sup> In total, ten enslaved persons were recorded as runaways who had not returned before the Slave Register of Returns in July 1834.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Roberts, ‘Working between the Lines’, p. 577.

<sup>98</sup> Turks and Caicos National Museum, ‘Runaway Slaves’, Slavery, 2017. <<https://www.tcmuseum.org/slavery/runaway-slaves/>> (12 August 2017).

<sup>99</sup> Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, p. 82.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> The National Archives, Slave Register of Returns for the Bahamas, July 1834, T 71/460.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

This was a relatively small number. But it does reveal *marronage* was influenced by sex, colour and country of origin: all were male, black creoles, excepting one male, mulatto creole. This pattern resonates with other parts of the British Caribbean. For example, in Barbados, Gad Heuman found the majority of ‘advertised runaways were male, creole, coloured and skilled slaves’ who were more able to pass as free in urban environments.<sup>106</sup> In Turks Islands, runaways also tended to be from skilled professions: the majority exited the islands by boat and needed adequate knowledge of seafaring.

Advertisements for runaways in local newspapers reveal this tendency. On 7 March 1794, Wade Stubbs posted a bulletin for ‘two Negro Men’ who ‘carried with them an open Sail Boat, drawing about 2 Feet Water, Bermuda Built, Plank and Timbers all Cedar, sailed only with a Shoulder of Mutton Sail’.<sup>107</sup> The same slaveholder also reported the single largest slave escape within the Bahamas when ‘on the night of the 9th of September’ 1800, fourteen enslaved persons fled ‘in a small one mast boat’.<sup>108</sup> This largely familial group included Harry, ‘a short young man’ who was ‘a good boatman, and has worked some time at the sail making business’.<sup>109</sup> Without Harry’s expertise, it is unlikely all fourteen could have successfully escaped together. In truth, while flight by boat was commonly reported across the Caribbean, at Turks Islands it was the *only* practical choice. Enslaved pilots, mariners and seamen had the best chance of escape, given their privileged access and skillset.

However, even for a skilled seaman, sailing free of Turks Islands was challenging. As Pusey reflected, ‘the entire islands are of Coralline Formation and there are many dangerous reefs over which several vessels bound from north through the passage southward are wrecked’.<sup>110</sup> Sailing away from these islands could be treacherous, especially as runaways could only realistically flee at night.

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<sup>106</sup> Gad Heuman, ‘Runaway slaves in nineteenth-century Barbados’, *Slavery & Abolition*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (Jun., 2008), p. 109.

<sup>107</sup> Wade Stubbs, ‘Advertisement in *Bahama Gazette*’, 7 March 1794, in Douglas B Chambers, *Documenting Runaway Slaves Project: Runaway Slaves in the Bahamas Islands, 1784-1819* (Hattiesburg: University of Southern Mississippi, 2014), p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> James Hyatt, Subscriber for Wade Stubbs, ‘Advertisement in *Bahama Gazette*’, 14 October 1800, in Douglas B Chambers, *Documenting Runaway Slaves Project: Runaway Slaves in the Bahamas Islands, 1784-1819* (Hattiesburg: University of Southern Mississippi, 2014), p. 70.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Pusey, *The Handbook of the Turks and Caicos*, p. 9.

Even a successful escape may not prove permanent. On 12 November 1770, King's Agent Andrew Symmer reported to the Secretary of State that 'Sundry Negroes...made their Escapes from these islands, to the adjacent French & Spanish Settlements on the neighbouring island of St Domingo'.<sup>111</sup>

'Accordingly', Symmer 'repeatedly wrote to the French and Spanish Governors of the Northern Department of that Island' and, after threatening the Governors with an embargo on their salt trade, 'the Negroes were delivered up to my Orders by the Count of Choiseul, and are since arrived here which will put a Stop to such Desertions for the future'.<sup>112</sup> In this instance, the runaways successfully made it as far as Hispaniola before being returned.

Moreover, regulations made it challenging for runaways to obtain suitable vessels. Both in 1774 and 1781, the regulations stipulated that 'No Salt Raker possessing any boat, shall leave his Sails on board such Boat in the Night Time, on pain of being excluded the Benefit of the Ponds for that Year'.<sup>113</sup> While determined runaways *could* still acquire boats, this regulation reduced their chances. Given its hefty penalties it is unlikely salt gatherers would knowingly fail to comply. In fact, fleeing slavery at Turks Islands was very difficult – both because of the nature of its small, flat island environment and the Head Rights System's regulations that were in place. Prince's narrative does not refer to any incidents of escape.

Salt island slavery therefore posed particular challenges. In this environment, salt was an agent with disproportionate influence over the body of the enslaved: not only did it corrode and infect salt rakers' skin but the risks of losing a crop through rain created a notoriously intense work regimen. Such an exploitative system of domination was supported through the Head Rights System that sought maximum productivity and offered few protections to the enslaved salt labourers. It permitted salt gatherers much leniency and autonomy over their enslaved population. When it did comment on slavery – for example, when it prohibited enslaved persons from raking salt on their own account or when it restricted permissible *petit marronage* to a maximum of forty-eight hours

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<sup>111</sup> The National Archives, Letter from the King's Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State, 12 November 1770, CO 23/20 f. 7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> The National Archives, The Royal Regulations, 29 June 1781, CO 23/15 ff. 134-137.

– the Head Rights System only served to shore up salt-gatherer hegemony. At the same time, the islands’ geography put the enslaved salt rakers at a disadvantage: they could not grow crops at Turks Islands nor develop a sense of communal identity through an internal marketing system nor easily flee the islands in a bid to escape. These were specific challenges to Turks Islands, emanating from its saline environment and management structure, which radically undercut the ability of the salt raker to gain any sort of purchase on socioeconomic autonomy.

Prince’s *History* is a singular account, but it was emblematic of the many who toiled under a scorching sun in the salt ponds of the Caribbean. When Prince returned to Bermuda she was relieved: ‘I was joyful, for I was sick, sick of Turk’s Island’.<sup>114</sup> And though she ‘had more than enough to do – but still, it was not so very bad as Turk’s Island’.<sup>115</sup> That place had become a marker of cruelty on her existential horizon. The islands’ system of domination would shift in freedom, but her descriptions of salt production and its labour practices would continue to find relevance.

### **Salt labour in freedom**

In a recent analysis of Caribbean historiography, Christer Petley has called attention to historians who investigate the transformations and continuities that occurred between slavery and freedom.<sup>116</sup> Often, emancipation (1838) becomes the end date for scholarly work in slavery studies, but there is a need to resist this chronology and explore how systems of domination continued. Within studies that have done this, Howard Johnson has argued still too much attention has been given to plantation societies.<sup>117</sup> The rest of this chapter speaks from within that historiographical context. To this point, it has demonstrated that salt rakers faced distinct challenges in salt island slavery, but it now asks the question, did these labour relations significantly change in freedom? Was the newly freed peasantry

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<sup>114</sup> Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 12.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> Petley, ‘New Perspectives on Slavery and Emancipation’, p. 875.

<sup>117</sup> Howard Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Slavery’: The Credit and Truck Systems in the Bahamas in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 28 No. 4 (Oct., 1986), p. 729.

able to acquire shares in the ponds on an equal basis to their former masters? Or were innovative strategies of control erected to prevent this?

Following the conclusion of the apprenticeship system in 1838, the conditions of salt raking changed little. Contemporaries recognised that it remained an objectionable form of labour. Governor John Gregory stated in 1852,

It must be borne in mind that the labour of salt raking is most distasteful to the Negro; as well as to the White Man, involving the most painful Exposure of the Face to the Sun & Mosquitoes and the most distressing Effects upon the feet from constant immersion in brine.<sup>118</sup>

In this passage, Governor Gregory called attention to bodily infirmities that Prince related to twenty years before. Due to the nature of salt, constant immersion in brine caused ‘the most distressing Effect upon the feet’ while glare instigated ‘the most painful Exposure of the Face’. These arduous conditions fed persistent racial attitudes, which existed in slavery and continued in freedom. For example, Francis Eve, a magistrate who produced a report in 1842 on the newly freed peasantry, commented that the ‘Africans, recently liberated,...are the best persons to work the Salt Ponds – I doubt if Europeans could stand the Heat of the Weather, or if they would at all answer for Salt Pond Labourers’.<sup>119</sup> Like Governor Gregory, Eve believed these conditions were not conducive to European labour. The heat was too strong, the brine was too corrosive, and the sun was too powerful for European bodies to (have to) endure. The effects of working with salt had not changed. Consequently, there must have been powerful incentives for the newly freed to remain harvesting this commodity.

Eve’s report provides insight on this point as it details the socioeconomic status of the freed peasantry. While providing information on the current relations between the new peasantry and old proprietors as well as ‘the progress of the labourers in establishing themselves as freeholders’, Eve stated ‘in these Islands, there is no Tenancy on estates. Very few of the Proprietors and none of

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<sup>118</sup> Howard Johnson, ‘Labour Systems in Post-emancipation Bahamas’, *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 1/2 (Mar.-Jun., 1988), p. 188.

<sup>119</sup> The National Archives, Report of Francis A Eve on the Salt Ponds at Turks Islands, 30 June 1842, CO 23/113 ff. 200-204.

the Peasantry are freeholders'.<sup>120</sup> As in the slavery period, land on Turks Islands remained Crown land and could not be bought, sold or otherwise alienated. However, significantly, the freed people 'having a proportionate part, or a share, in the Salt Ponds Annually have become attached to the soil'.<sup>121</sup> In one sentence, the continuance of the Head Rights System, from slavery to freedom, was clearly revealed. Quite uniquely in the Caribbean, the Head Rights System safeguarded the right of *all* British subjects to have equal access to pond shares. By law, the freed peasantry were permitted to enter the ponds *on the same terms* as their former masters. In the sugar-producing islands, freedmen who reclaimed agricultural fields could often be described (and treated) as squatters, but this was not so at Turks Islands. As the apprenticeship system ended, the law enabled rather than hindered their ability to become salt gatherers. Though the work remained arduous, the Head Rights System provided an immediate opportunity for self-sustainability. Many took it. To become financially viable, 'many of the male labourers...unite and work shares in the ponds together'.<sup>122</sup> As Eve reflected, 'very few, if indeed any, have left these Islands to locate elsewhere' and 'they are altogether independent of their former masters'.<sup>123</sup>

Without slavery in place, a more traditional division of labour also occurred. Though historically the salt ponds had a preponderance of male black labourers, Eve noted that 'since Emancipation...the Creole females...do not work in the Salt Ponds'.<sup>124</sup> They either 'hire themselves for work of a domestic nature' or 'employ themselves at their homes'.<sup>125</sup> This trend was not singular to the salt islands. It was witnessed across the Caribbean in post-emancipation societies. According to Barbara Bush, slavery had pushed 'an alien division of labour' upon the enslaved woman 'which negated and undermined the traditional African division of labour'.<sup>126</sup> This changed during emancipation as many freed women 'reverted to a subordinate position within the black family' and withdrew from estate labour.<sup>127</sup> Thomas Holt has pointed out this was a huge blow to sugar

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Society 1650-1838* (London: Currey, 1990), p. 92.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

plantations ‘because almost without exception they had constituted the bulk of the field labour force during the latter years of slavery’.<sup>128</sup> In Turks Islands, there was a similar withdrawal of women. Like sugar harvesting, this suggests salt raking was physically arduous and that, as a female occupation, the wider community objected to it. In the wake of emancipation, more traditional gender roles were re-established.

Hence, while the Head Rights System remained in force, the freed peasantry could partake equally with their former masters and internally manage a division of labour that suited their community’s preferences. Though the intense nature of salt production did not change, the right to work on one’s own account significantly ameliorated that fact.

### *The enclosure of the ponds*

However, in the 1840s, the system would change. Across the Caribbean, colonies were struggling financially as labourers deserted their former masters’ estates. The prospect of a subsistence peasantry, with an ever-increasing subdivision of land, put London officials ill at ease. This was no less true for the salt islands, as it was for the sugar islands. There the Bahamian Governor warned of ‘the difficulty... arising from the increased sub-division of interest in the Ponds’.<sup>129</sup> Pressures mounted. Governors were encouraged to implement strategies to boost capital investment and ensure each colony’s future prosperity. In Turks Islands, the Board of Trade believed the Head Rights System could no longer continue in its present form.

In December 1841, the Board of Trade compiled a report on the current and future management of the salt ponds. Its commissioners cast the issue as an untenable struggle between labourers and capitalists, which was indefensibly obstructing the industrial development of the islands. Their report stated there was no ‘fair remedy’ to protect both the ‘more numerous race of labourers’ and ‘the capitalists’ at the same time, fearing above all ‘the manifest injury

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labour, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 152.

<sup>129</sup> The National Archives, Report of the Board of Trade on the management of the salt ponds in the Bahamas, 17 December 1841, CO 23/113 ff. 162-176.

which...must result to all classes of the community...from maintaining a system of division among a community consisting of capitalists, without a supply of labour, and of labourers without capital'.<sup>130</sup> Since emancipation, many of the freedmen had taken their own shares in the ponds, leaving former masters with insufficient labour forces and fewer shares of their own to profit by. This situation dissuaded venture capitalists from investing in the ponds and improving the islands' infrastructure while threatening the already-shaken social order.

These problems mirrored processes that were occurring across the sugar islands of the British Caribbean. W A Green has pointed out 'the abolition of slavery shook the planting system'.<sup>131</sup> In Jamaica, freedmen increasingly fled the plantations and gravitated towards registering freeholds on newly abandoned land or squatting on marginal sites with poorer soils.<sup>132</sup> Naturally, 'those who had been freed sought to create new ways of life independent of the plantation'.<sup>133</sup> This often included some part-time work on estates but was notably shared with market gardening on provision grounds as well.<sup>134</sup> However, as Mintz has argued, this caused 'a sharp decrease in sugar production'.<sup>135</sup> Suddenly, 'proprietors lost their captive labour force during slack seasons' and were forced to economise and retrench.<sup>136</sup> With depleting labour forces, many invested in technological innovations to try and compensate but most could not avoid reducing their overall acreage and many plantations fell into disuse.

These deteriorating economic conditions worried metropolitan and colonial governments. While smaller islands with higher population densities such as Barbados, St Kitts and Antigua had more success in controlling their workforce, larger islands with lower population densities found this more difficult.<sup>137</sup> In response, officials progressively, rigorously and actively sought to reverse the trends. Legislation and lawsuits increasingly restricted the peasantry's access to land through the introduction of vagrancy laws that were

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> W A Green, 'The Planter Class and British West Indian Sugar Production, before and after Emancipation', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 26 No. 3 (1973), p. 454.

<sup>132</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 143-166.

<sup>133</sup> Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>134</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 161.

<sup>135</sup> Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>136</sup> Green, 'The Planter Class', p. 454.

<sup>137</sup> Bonham C Richardson, *The Caribbean in the wider world, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 74.



supported by strengthened systems of police, magistrates and prisons. Moreover, large numbers of contracted labourers were successively introduced via the coolie trade, which increased overall labour market competition, driving down wages and providing a new captive labour force. Primarily from India, in total ‘nearly 250,000 went to British Guiana, almost 150,000 to Trinidad, and over 36,000 to Jamaica’, each on five-year contracts.<sup>138</sup> Such land policy and labour market manipulations reinforced one another and strongly indicated ‘the planter class sought to recreate pre-emancipation conditions’ and ‘replace the discipline of slavery with the discipline of hunger’.<sup>139</sup> Broadly, it did succeed in helping the remaining and most resilient estates maintain their operations.

Such outcomes in the sugar islands informed the Board of Trade’s policy interventions in the salt islands. The Board of Trade’s report on the salt ponds had a distinctly comparative cast, highlighting how plans undertaken in the sugar islands had ‘been adopted purposefully to discourage persons without Capital from becoming Landowners’.<sup>140</sup> In doing so, it reported that the ‘emancipated classes’ were successfully prevented ‘from all becoming at once Proprietors instead of continuing satisfied with their present station as labourers’.<sup>141</sup> That similar policy interventions should be introduced at Turks Islands was the obvious, underlying suggestion. But the sugar and salt islands had very different economies. In Turks Islands, the Head Rights System legally protected access to the ponds as a right. As such, the need for land reform was arguably greater and more pressing. The entire system required an overhaul.

To tackle it, the commissioners recognised they would have to dismantle the Head Rights System’s core economic principle of free and unrestrained access. This legally protected the right of all British subjects, including the freedmen, to become participants of the ponds’ inclusive commons. Such a ‘problem’ had to be confronted from three different angles. First, the commissioners foresaw ‘no other way of solving this difficulty than by declining in future to give away a share of the Ponds to any person whatever’ rendering the

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<sup>138</sup> Gad Heuman, *The Caribbean* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 105.

<sup>139</sup> Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 70.

<sup>140</sup> The National Archives, Report from the Board of Trade on the management of the salt ponds in the Bahamas, 17 December 1841, CO 23/113 ff. 162-176.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

ponds no longer ‘open access’.<sup>142</sup> Second, ‘by fixing such a price to be paid for the use of the shares’, the commissioners intended to ‘effectually prevent their falling into the hands of persons without capital, and at the same time place the acquisition of them within probable reach of the industrious of all classes’.<sup>143</sup> As a result, the shares would no longer be free but sold at a price that was deliberately and prohibitively expensive for those with reduced purchasing power. Finally, whereas the pond shares were formerly renewed annually, the commissioners proposed that in future they should be sold on twenty-one year leases with the opportunity for renewal without exposure to competition. In all, it was a staggering reorganisation of the ponds’ political economy. From open to private access; from free to priced shares; from annual to twenty-one year leases: all anticipated the enclosure of the ponds and their concentration into fewer, wealthier hands. Finally, in 1845, the Bahamian Assembly legislated, and an Act was passed which implemented virtually all of the commissioners’ proposals. The Head Rights System, a system that had functioned uniquely in the British Caribbean for almost a century, was overturned. It was a deliberate manoeuvre to control land access.

### *The ‘proletarianisation’ of the peasantry*

With the introduction of twenty-one year leases, the lower classes of Turks Islands were pushed off the ponds as proprietors and welcomed back as wage labourers. As shares became concentrated into fewer hands, the need for wage labour grew. To re-attract the dispossessed peasantry, initially high wages had to be offered. This was predicted early. In 1835, Governor Blayney Balfour already anticipated that labourers in the salt islands would have to be induced to work through high wages.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, in 1852, Governor Gregory attested, ‘No man will voluntarily submit to it [salt raking], Except under the stimulus of very high wages’.<sup>145</sup> The working conditions were simply too arduous, too unpleasant, to attract the required numbers on a low or average wage. However, saltpan holders

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Slavery’”, p. 739.

<sup>145</sup> Governor John Gregory quoted in Johnson, ‘Labour Systems in Post-emancipation Bahamas’, p. 188.

also benefited from the fact a freedman had few alternative options available. Agriculture on these tiny islands was minimal. Inhabitants could migrate altogether, or they could work on the ponds.

Old patterns of dependency began to re-emerge. As ‘periods of prolonged drought in the salt-producing islands hindered the cultivation of food crops, labourers usually depended on shops operated by their employers for basic foodstuffs’.<sup>146</sup> In slavery, Prince was reliant on her master to give her food. This did not drastically change in freedom. Wage labourers continued to be dependent on their employers for sustenance. But they were arguably more vulnerable because should rain fall, they could be thrown out of employment. As late as 1897, Pusey was still commenting that ‘as soon as winter sets in and rain is the result, the salt pond operations suddenly cease and the labourer has to *skip* here and there for a living’.<sup>147</sup> In those instances when wages failed, labourers had no choice but ‘to seek credit from the resident merchant’, who was often their employer.<sup>148</sup> In Turks Islands, ‘the roles of employer, landlord or entrepreneur and of supplier of subsistence and production loans’ were usually combined.<sup>149</sup>

Out of this situation, credit and truck systems emerged, which had their roots in practices ‘used in connection with the free Africans during slavery’.<sup>150</sup> Then, liberated Africans were apprenticed to a salt gatherer, allegedly to learn a trade, and received their wages in kind rather than cash. For Johnson, this ‘provides the clearest evidence for the continuation into freedom of practices which had been developed during the period of slavery’ and signified a form of ‘intensified labour coercion’.<sup>151</sup> Salt wage labourers were able to obtain provisions and clothing (called ‘truck’) during their periods of unemployment, but they paid for it using ‘credit’ drawn off future wages. In theory, this provided a safety net during hard times and meant that cash, a rare commodity on the islands, need not be exchanged. In reality, it forced salt labourers into a chronic form of debt-peonage in relation to their employer/merchant/creditors. Because salt labourers were not always able to pay off their debts in bad salt seasons, they

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Pusey, *The Handbook of the Turks and Caicos Islands*, p. 60. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Slavery’”, p. 738.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 752.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 721.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 737 and p. 753.

became tied to the salt ponds and indebted to the more powerful classes of Turks Island society. This reliance ‘gave proprietors...a control of labour’ and in the absence of slavery, it ‘recreated in freedom a dependent labour force’.<sup>152</sup>

Employer/merchant/creditors used these systems to secure a captive consumer base and pawn sub-quality goods. Employees were often given paper tokens, which could only be used at specific stores.<sup>153</sup> Their employers owned these stores and charged exorbitant prices for basic provisions, undercutting and offsetting the benefit of any ‘high wage’. In 1847, a stipendiary magistrate for the area of Turks Islands and Inagua commented on the extortion prevalent within the credit and truck system:

The truck system is much in vogue here & nothing but a Savings Bank can remedy the many evils attendant upon it. Every leaseholder is a Shopkeeper and every labourer pays weekly 100 per cent on the prime cost in the United States of America for the necessaries of life.<sup>154</sup>

The quality of provisions could also be shocking. One observer chillingly remarked in 1889 that ‘not only rancid pork and No. 3 flour, but will further say putrid pork and No. 4 flour, flour that scarce be stomached, and at an enormous price had been given to the poor labourers’.<sup>155</sup> So unfair and rigged was the system, that he called it a ‘partisan warfare of slavery...I mean to say that the labourers were bound; yes bound to their employers, as slaves were to their masters’.<sup>156</sup> When Prince reflected on freedom (‘to be free is very sweet’) it is doubtful she had in mind such exploitative labour practices.

These credit and truck systems flourished at Turks Islands and allowed saltpan holders to manipulate the work force. Salt labourers effectively became stuck. Unable to become proprietors, they were forced into eating sub-standard goods while locked in a relentless embrace with debt-peonage. In effect, they were no longer free to leave. For Johnson, this represented ‘a modified form of slavery’ and provided evidence that a monopoly of credit, rather than land, kept the elite classes in positions of power within post-emancipation Bahamian

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 739 and p. 750.

<sup>153</sup> Johnson, ‘Labour Systems in Post-emancipation Bahamas’, p. 189.

<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Johnson, “‘A Modified Form of Slavery’”, p. 737.

<sup>155</sup> Winifred Richardson quoted in Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1991), p. 75.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

society.<sup>157</sup> In arguing this, he challenged O Nigel Bolland's insistence that historians 'study the interrelationship of the control of land and the control of labour as two aspects of a system of domination which persisted long after slavery was declared illegal'.<sup>158</sup> Instead, Johnson suggested land policy interventions were not important to the Bahamian experience. This chapter would suggest a revision for Turks Islands is required. At Turks Islands, land policy interventions were *extremely significant* in shaping the newly freed peasantry's ability to achieve social and economic autonomy. The Head Rights System, if it had continued, would have allowed all freed persons to equally partake in the ponds on a proportional basis to their former masters. In infertile Turks Islands, this was the only feasible way to create an independent livelihood and between 1838 and 1845 it was possible. However, the Head Rights System did not continue. It was deliberately dismantled. The ponds, formerly an inclusive commons, were enclosed and privatised. Seen from this perspective, the enclosure of the ponds *and* the credit and truck systems – a control of land *and* a control of labour – were indeed interrelated strategies of a new system of domination.

## Conclusion

From slavery and into freedom, labour on the saltpans was always 'unfree' in some way. This coercion was implicit because salt was inherently unpleasant to work with and its profitability necessitated an intense form of production. Both in slavery and in freedom, the experience of salt raking was visceral. Bodily injuries on the saltpans were particular to its production. Blindness, pickled limbs, salt blisters and sleep deprivation, coupled with meagre diets, all signalled this was an unhealthy environment in which to live and work. Moreover, due to the short salt season and risk of rainfall, labourers were consistently pushed to their limits in order to minimise risk and boost profitability. Given a viable alternative, it is hard to imagine a salt labourer would willingly choose this

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>158</sup> O Nigel Bolland, 'Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies after 1838', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23 No. 4. (Oct., 1981), p. 611.

profession. For the salt industry to flourish – for the few – those in power had to introduce coercive systems of domination.

During Prince's time at Turks Islands, a form of salt island slavery matured that shaped the lives of salt rakers in distinctive ways. The Head Rights System was underpinned by principles that geared the saltpans towards maximum productivity but offered little in terms of protection for the industry's captive labourers. When it did intervene, it tried to block the development of any autonomy amongst enslaved people. While *marronage* was already difficult on these tiny, remote islands, the Head Rights System's definition reduced *petit marronage* to an unprecedented degree, curtailing any temporary release from this pressurised system. Moreover, developing social and economic self-sufficiency was similarly obstructed as enslaved people were prohibited from accumulating salt – the one commodity available with which to barter and trade. With no internal marketing system, the enslaved salt rakers toiled round the clock for their masters: there was little release and little opportunity for community development. Moreover, in its silence, the Head Rights System granted salt gatherers an inordinate amount of control over the work regimen, punishment practices, and provisioning regimes of the islands' enslaved labourers. Beyond the pale of magisterial oversight, and with a white creole culture known for excess, the treatment of enslaved salt rakers largely depended on the character of the individual salt gatherer.

In freedom, systems of domination shifted but they did not end. After a brief experiment with universal access to the ponds, those in power sought a radical change in their management. The Head Rights System, which had prevailed over Turks Islands for almost a century, was deliberately dismantled. One of the last great commons of the British Caribbean was suddenly no more. It was an act of privatisation that forced shares back into fewer, wealthier, whiter hands. At the same time, powerful credit and truck systems were implemented that kept the newly freed labourers in a state of debt-peonage, tying them closer to the saltpans and making it harder for them to leave. The brief period between 1838 and 1845, which had permitted the new peasantry to join the ponds on equal terms to their former masters, was precisely that: brief. Such drastic land and labour restructuring belies the truth: that systems of domination shifted and

transformed but they did not end. Unfree labour would remain a salient feature of salt production.

## Chapter 7: ‘Essential...for commanding the Navigation of those Seas’: British Mercantilism and Turks Islands’ Defence, c. 1764-1802

### Introduction

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, France and Britain vied with each other for naval supremacy.<sup>1</sup> The Caribbean, being of naval and commercial importance to both these empires, was often a site of struggle. From 1756 to 1802, it experienced more years of conflict than peace. The Seven Years’ War, American Revolutionary War, and French Revolutionary Wars all travelled to and reverberated around this space. As international warfare ebbed and flowed, Turks Islands did not remain isolated or unscathed. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that, as Out Islands of the Bahamas, Turks Islands were some of the most precariously placed within the British Caribbean. Yet, in the context of mercantilist empire, Turks Islands were also located at a significant watery crossroads: the Windward Passage. This chapter will argue that, despite their vulnerabilities, Turks Islands were able to secure critical military resources because of their emerging importance to British mercantilism.

To achieve this, the chapter is divided into three parts. It begins by explaining the strategic importance of Turks Islands to the geopolitical interests of Britain and France in the eighteenth century. It will focus on the French attack on Turks Islands in 1764, which sparked a frenzied debate between the colonial governments involved. A decisive outcome of the attack was the unprecedented creation of a new commission for Turks Islands, which had sweeping consequences for the islands in question, particularly because as Out Islands these were highly vulnerable. The second part of this chapter will seek to address that Out Island vulnerability through an investigation of the natural and human factors inhibiting the region’s overall defensibility. The final part will then explain why, despite these limitations, Turks Islands’ officials were relatively successful compared to other Out Islands in securing small but critical military

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Baugh, ‘Withdrawing from Europe: Anglo-French Maritime Geopolitics, 1750-1800’, *The International History Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1 (Mar., 1998), p. 1.



resources in a period when decision-makers overwhelmingly sent Britain's troops, sailors, guns and ships elsewhere.

This chapter is rooted in a conception of the ocean that sees it as a contested and 'uniquely constructed space'.<sup>2</sup> By this, it is understood that the world-ocean has never been a mere 'transport surface' or an unmanaged, neutral zone.<sup>3</sup> For Philip Steinberg, this makes the ocean not simply a space used *by* society, but a place *of* society and he demonstrates how historically the development of modern capitalism has required, implemented and been shaped by a particular spatiality of the world-ocean.<sup>4</sup> Of great relevance to Turks Islands is his spatial analysis of 'merchant capitalism' or mercantilism.<sup>5</sup> When European powers began to explore the Atlantic in the fifteenth century, they travelled with a conception of the ocean based on Mediterranean understandings of stewardship.<sup>6</sup> Stewardship was rooted in the idea that while *dominium* could not be extended into the deep sea (i.e. the ocean could not be owned in a sovereign, territorial sense), *imperium* could be.<sup>7</sup> Because of this, the ocean could act as a 'force-field', a place where state power was projected, social forces interacted and maritime battles played out.<sup>8</sup> The sea was 'non-possessible' as it resisted incorporation into a landed polity but parts of it could be controlled to shepherd resources.<sup>9</sup> In the era of mercantilism, the idea of controlling 'channelled circulation' was fundamental.<sup>10</sup>

This is because mercantilists assumed economic resources were finite.<sup>11</sup> As a result, mercantilists sought to minimise imports and maximise exports, in order to accumulate specie within an empire's borders. Such a 'static conception of the total economic resources in the world' assumed trade was a mutually

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 68-109.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on Steinberg's conception of Mediterranean stewardship, see Ibid, pp. 61-66.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 69 No. 1 (Jan., 2012), p. 14.

exclusive, zero-sum game.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, ‘each mercantilist state developed a set of policies built round the control of trade...and because trade was primarily a marine affair, mercantilist states put a high premium on exercising social power at sea’.<sup>13</sup> As European empires gravitated towards siphoning off and encapsulating valuable commercial routes, discrete oceanic corridors became contested and militarised places.

For Lauren Benton, this created maritime empires patterned with areas of partial, shared or quasi-sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> While ‘empires did lay claim to vast stretches of territory’, in practice they were internally variegated and had a quality of ‘lumpiness’ to them.<sup>15</sup> Effective control was often limited to enclaves, outposts, rivers, islands and discrete ocean corridors, where ‘legal authority produced irregular and only roughly concentric zones of control around them’.<sup>16</sup> As such, European empires expanded in ‘a maritime world in which authority was...limited in practice to the control of sea lanes rather than extensive ocean zones’ and where ‘enclaves were strung like beads along interconnected corridors’.<sup>17</sup> Imperial authority was not monolithic but decidedly patchy, contouring around channels of trade.

When applied to the Caribbean’s passages, both Steinberg and Benton shed light on how valuable these became as resources of connection – umbilical chords linking wealthy sugar-producing islands with metropolitan ports. These resources of connection were anything but unmanaged, unregulated or just *there*. They were jostled for, sites of tension and jealously guarded. In this tussle, islands situated nearby were apt to become watery enclaves, growing in importance and distinctiveness, from which empires could project their *imperium* seawards. As this chapter will show, Turks Islands would become such a watery enclave at the end of the Bahamian archipelago, emerging as a place of geopolitical significance that was distinct from its Out Island neighbours. In the

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<sup>12</sup> Eli Heckscher quoted in *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Steinberg, *Social Construction of the Ocean*, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2 and pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2. Lauren Benton, ‘Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 47 No. 4 (Oct., 2005), p. 706.

process, Turks Islands provide a valuable case study for illuminating a socially constructed Caribbean Sea.

### **The strategic importance of Turks Islands**

In the mid-eighteenth century, European empires broadly adhered to mercantilist economic practices. In the development of French mercantilism, Jean-Baptist Colbert proved a pivotal figure. He was appointed Minister of Finance in 1661 and first Minister of the Navy in 1669. Under his tutelage, tariffs were introduced on imported manufactured goods, French merchants were encouraged to invest in France's colonial trade and, critically, the French navy was dramatically expanded.<sup>18</sup> On his appointment, France had only twenty-five ships of the line, but when he departed in 1683, this number had increased to 250.<sup>19</sup> While the French navy did not frequently risk confrontation with the English navy, it was tasked with promoting French commerce and disrupting that of its rivals.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, whenever inter-imperial conflicts arose in the Caribbean, the French would follow a policy of *guerre de course*: 'commerce raiding as a naval strategy'.<sup>21</sup> In a mercantilist world of finite resources, attacking a rival's merchant shipping made cogent sense. In the zero-sum game of trade, France gained for itself what it took away from others.

It is therefore worth noting British mercantilism did not exist in a vacuum, but was repeatedly colliding with a similarly aggressive and competitive French mercantilism. Both empires sought control over trade in a Caribbean that was increasingly crowded with competing powers. In this setting, mercantilism stoked inter-imperial tensions and overlapping trade routes became watery sites of contention. As Benton attests, 'competing sovereign claims over intersecting corridors of sea space' produced 'a system of maritime regulation featuring persistent militarisation of ocean space'.<sup>22</sup> Here warfare would not perform like

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Byington, 'The Forgotten Service: The French Navy of the Old Regime, 1650-1789' (MA dissertation, Florida State University, 2011), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Ward, 'Nowhere is Perfect: British Naval Centres on the Leeward Islands Station during the Eighteenth Century', *Caribbean Connections*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Feb., 2011), pp. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Benton, *In Search of Sovereignty*, p. 121.

an ‘independent variable’ but was often a direct result of mercantilism’s competitive edge – an expression of increasing rivalry between Britain and France.<sup>23</sup>

This was exemplified during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) that played out in multiple colonial theatres. In its aftermath, France suffered humiliating defeat. Following British concern over French territorial aggression, it was forced to give up its North American colonies. France was left to tend to its most valuable possession in the Caribbean: Saint Domingue. Protecting its trade became a priority, particularly for Etienne Francois, the Duke of Choiseul and France’s new Minister of the Navy.<sup>24</sup> However, to protect its trade France needed to extend *imperium* over the resource of connection that channelled circulation between the colony and metropolitan France: the Windward Passage.

There lay a problem. At the northern entrance of the passage were Turks Islands and by the mid-eighteenth century these were populated with British subjects on an annual basis from March to November. Salt had drawn seafaring Bermudians to these desolate, but strategic islands. Unpopulated, they possessed little threat to the French. However, once populated, Turks Islands had the potential to radiate authority over this nearby channel and threatened to bring British interests into these waters. French mercantilists eyed these islands nervously. They would have known any provocation with Britain at this time was risky. Yet, in 1764, Turks Islands also did not have any effective local government, were completely unprotected and seemingly marginal to British imperial concerns. It seemed a risk worth taking.

#### *The French attack on Turks Islands*

On 1 June 1764, while Bermudians and their enslaved labourers were raking salt, a 64-gun French man-of-war with several other armed vessels appeared on the horizon and, ‘with Drums beating’, ‘landed a number of men’.<sup>25</sup> The scenes at

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<sup>23</sup> Silvia Marzagalli, ‘The French Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, in Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World: 1450-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 239.

<sup>24</sup> Byington, ‘The Forgotten Service’, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> The National Archives, Report of John Reynolds enclosed in Sir William Burnaby’s letter to Philip Stephens of the Admiralty Office, 20 June 1764, CO 23/7/146.

Salt Key and Grand Turk were violent. One salt gatherer described how the invading forces ‘burnt and destroyed all the Hutts, likewise the Corn which they had for subsistence...[T]hey left nothing that was of Service to the English unburnt’.<sup>26</sup> Those who could ran to take shelter ‘amongst the bushes’.<sup>27</sup> The less fortunate were seized as the French forces carried off ‘fourteen sail of vessels with every person they could get hold of’ to Cape Francois, granting no time for belongings to be gathered.<sup>28</sup> As a last act, the French erected several pillars before apparently quitting the islands. As word of the attack reached Jamaica and New Providence, alarm was raised. A series of urgent correspondence was transacted between Governor Shirley of the Bahamas, Admiral Burnaby of the Jamaica Station and Governor D’Estaing of Saint Domingue. After repeated exchanges, during which both Governors appealed to superiors in Europe for guidance, significant diplomatic pressure was applied from the highest sources of authority. In November, the French Court disavowed the proceedings and the French King ordered his Governor to evacuate all French subjects from Turks Islands, restore them to their original state, and indemnify those who had sustained damages in the raid.<sup>29</sup> Admiral Burnaby sent a frigate to Turks Islands to supervise while the Jamaican Government made sure the Bermudians were compensated. The following year, the salt gatherers returned and resumed their modest undertaking.

Lasting only a few months, this event could easily be interpreted as trivial to imperial concerns. Doing so underestimates the ramifications it had for the region’s geopolitical security. In the correspondence that followed, British imperial and colonial actors profusely debated the meaning of this audacious raid. Was this a pre-meditated attempt at dispossession? If so, would it happen again? To draw conclusions, several aspects of the attack were vigorously discussed.

First, the pillars were studied. According to Patricia Seed, when French colonists initially explored and claimed spaces of the New World, marks of

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<sup>26</sup> The National Archives, Testimony of Mansfield Frith sworn before Captain Weller, 16 August 1764, CO 23/16/51.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> The National Archives, Philip Stephens of the Admiralty Office to Edward Sedgwick, 2 August 1764, CO 23/7/144.

<sup>29</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Shirley, 8 November 1764, CO 23/16/35.

possession were often constructed.<sup>30</sup> If the discovery took them by surprise, marks were created from any local material that could be found. The pillars assembled at Turks Islands differed fundamentally in this respect. As Governor D’Estaing admitted, a French frigate had been deliberately sent to carry ‘Stone and Lime’ to Turks Islands.<sup>31</sup> Once assembled, the pillars bore inscriptions and decorations including a marble frontispiece, iron lettering and an engraved *fleur de lys*. This materiality, design and construction suggested a planned project. By 1764, Turks Islands were no longer undiscovered territory. The pillars warned of an altogether more aggressive attempt, at a time of peace, to possess the islands for the French by knowingly dispossessing them from the British.

Governor D’Estaing did offer a counter-narrative. He was adamant the pillars were not marks of possession but lighthouses intended for the benefit of all maritime powers. Andrew Symmer reported this following a conversation with the Governor at Port au Prince, shortly after the attack. Far from desiring any misunderstanding between the two governments, the French Governor stated the frigate carried up materials merely,

...to erect two Lighthouses, one on the North Key and the other on the South, on which he would suffer no Coat of arms, or mark of Possession to be affixed, only a Latin Inscription, that these Lighthouses were Erected for the common benefit of all Trading Nations.<sup>32</sup>

That Latin inscription was from Cicero: ‘in nothing are men more like gods than when they save their fellow men’.<sup>33</sup> With this inscription and without a coat of arms, knowing these seas were full of ‘sunken rocks’, Governor D’Estaing painted the event as a philanthropic act for the mutual benefit of all sailors.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Patricia Seed, ‘Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of overseas Empires’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 49 No. 2 (Apr., 1992), pp. 191-192.

<sup>31</sup> The National Archives, Andrew Symmer to Governor Shirley, 22 August 1764, CO 23/16/56.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Original Latin inscription ‘*Homines ad Deos nulla re propius accedunt quam Salutem Hominibus dando*’ quoted in The National Archives, Certification of Lieutenant Philip Brown of the Phare de Choiseuil, 1 January 1765, CO 23/16/108. Translation from Jon R Stone, *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations: The Illiterati’s Guide to Latin Maxims, Mottoes, Proverbs and Sayings* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> The National Archives, Certification of Lieutenant Philip Brown of the Phare de Choiseuil, 1 January 1765, CO 23/16/108.

Their construction, however, suggested otherwise. Following the attack, Governor Shirley sent an Army officer, Lieutenant Brown, to Saint Domingue with a letter of complaint. Upon failing to gain an audience with the French Governor, Brown returned to New Providence via Turks Islands with Captain Weller who had also been sent to Saint Domingue by Admiral Burnaby. When Weller was likewise denied an audience, he persuaded Brown to accompany him to Turks Islands and help him execute his final orders 'to knock down whatever marks of possession he should find they had erected'.<sup>35</sup> As both officers landed, these pillars appeared suspicious. For one their decorations were highly suggestive. Though Governor D'Estaing urged Governor Shirley to 'look upon the Fleur de Lys set upon the Top of the Phare, only as simple decoration', that symbol's historical significance and connection with the French Court was hard to ignore.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the two pillars identified both bore inscriptions, 'Phare de Stainville' and 'Phare de Choiseul', implying an uncomfortable French patronage of the land itself. Further intelligence confirmed these fears.<sup>37</sup> 'On the 29th day of September', Brown reported, 'upon my asking Monsieur Geoffrey, the Gentleman who was dispatched by the Count d'Estaing to your Excellency, who the before mentioned Stainville was, he told me, it was a former name or Title of the Duke of Choiseul the present Minister of France'.<sup>38</sup> That the Minister of France had pillars erected in his name on British territory undermined Governor D'Estaing's argument that these were simply functional.

Their topographical position was even more incriminating. In the case of the *Phare de Choiseul*, Brown's certification made clear its terrestrial position made no sense if it was intended to function as a lighthouse: 'the Phare de Choiseuile was overlooked by the land in such manner that it could be of no use to Pilots or mariners coming in there from the sea either by night or day, to serve as a Lighthouse or Land Mark'.<sup>39</sup> This roused deep suspicions amongst the British officials concerned. How could a pillar with 'no place for lights', upon

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<sup>35</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to Governor D'Estaing, 1 January 1765, CO 23/16/110.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant Philip Brown to Governor Shirley, 15 October 1765, CO 23/16/88.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The National Archives, Certification of Lieutenant Philip Brown of the Phare de Choiseuil, 1 January 1765, CO 23/16/108.

‘Low ground’ and overlooked by land realistically function as a lighthouse?<sup>40</sup> For Governor Shirley, there was no doubt. The pillars, at the time of construction, were ‘doubtless’ meant ‘as a Mark of French Possession’.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, intelligence reached Governor Shirley that while the French were at Turks Islands the salt gatherers ‘were prevailed on...to sign some Instrument or paper, wherein they have promised to be faithful subjects to the King of France’.<sup>42</sup> In attracting British subjects to Turks Islands, salt had transformed them from just a cluster of deserted, unimportant islands into a serious threat to French shipping. However, as sworn French subjects, the threat these gatherers posed was defused. The diplomatic sparring that followed this instrument was symptomatic of the narratives Governors Shirley and D’Estaing spun to out-manoeuvre each other politically. According to Governor D’Estaing, the French had merely acquiesced to the islanders’ ‘*request* to be admitted into the Number of His Most Christian Majesty’s Subjects, or those of his Catholic Majesty’.<sup>43</sup> It was ‘an Instance of Indulgence’, which matched his philanthropic defence of the pillars as ‘lighthouses’.<sup>44</sup> It did not appear to Governor Shirley in this light. He looked upon the instrument as an oppressive attempt to ‘break’ the inhabitants’ ‘Allegiance to their Natural Sovereign’.<sup>45</sup> Persons who had watched their belongings burnt, who had hid ‘in the Woods’ and who ‘were forced to surrender themselves Prisoners to prevent their being starved’, could hardly have made free decisions.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Governor Shirley excused the islanders for signing ‘a Paper in French’ which they did ‘not know the Contents of’ under circumstances of extreme duress.<sup>47</sup> However, he required them to sign a counter-declaration attesting to their re-allegiance to the British King.<sup>48</sup> This instrument

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<sup>40</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant Philip Brown to Governor Shirley, 23 September 1764, CO 23/16/44.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The National Archives, Copy of Oath of Allegiance enclosed in Governor Shirley’s despatch to the Secretary of State, 23 September 1764, CO 23/16/59.

<sup>43</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to Governor D’Estaing, 1 October 1764, CO 23/16/77.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to the Secretary of State, 23 September 1764, CO 23/16/40.

<sup>48</sup> The National Archives, Copy of Oath of Allegiance enclosed in Governor Shirley’s despatch to the Secretary of State, 23 September 1764, CO 23/16/59.



and counter-instrument demonstrate the salt gatherers' subject-hood was highly contested in the act of possession. While the pillars were interpreted to mean dominion over the land, the instrument threatened possession of its people.

The character of the salt gatherers was another focal point in these discussions. The question revolved around whether or not these people were peaceable settlers or lawless pirates. Benton's analysis of the writings of Alberico Gentili, an Italian jurist writing in the 1580s, sheds light on this topic. According to Benton, 'Gentili defined piracy as any taking not authorised by the sovereign. Takings at sea were merely analogous to robbery on land'.<sup>49</sup> Of salience to Turks Islands was the 'further implication...that any sovereign could extend the jurisdiction of its municipal law to foreign lands by asserting the existence of "pirates" there – or the absence of a controlling polity'.<sup>50</sup> In 1764, Governor D'Estaing utilised this legal discourse in his defence: 'some time ago two or three French Vessels had run ashore upon those Islands; that the people who were at that time settled on the place had drove the French from their Vessels and seized upon their Cargoes, which they carried off'.<sup>51</sup> When the crews reported this 'robbery' back at the Cape, the French Governor 'ordered up the *Brilliant* Man of War, and two Frigates with orders, that in case there was any Person with a Commission from his Britannick Majesty, they should commit no Violence, but only make complaint'.<sup>52</sup> However, 'finding no Person at the place Commissioned from his Britannick Majesty, he looked upon the Settlers in a Light not much differing from Pirates'.<sup>53</sup> As pirates, there could be no objection to their removal to Cape Francois.

However, when Symmer presented Governor D'Estaing with his commission to settle the islands after the attack, this legal discourse constricted how the Governor could react. His surprise was evident. Here was proof that a British official was on, or would soon be on, the islands *with a commission* for that purpose. As such, the inhabitants could no longer be legally defined as pirates, attached as they were to a sovereign: 'The Count D'Estaing told your

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<sup>49</sup> Benton, 'Legal Spaces of Empire', p. 705.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> The National Archives, Andrew Symmer to Governor Shirley, 22 August 1764, CO 23/16/56.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Memorialist, that although in his opinion Spain had the best Right to them [Turks Islands], he gave up all his Pretensions'.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the Governor 'released' all the prisoners taken to the Cape 'on finding the Vessels really belong[ed] to his Britannick Majesty's Subjects'.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, broader evidence was mounting that France wanted an enclave in the region. By 1764, it was known both French and British interests coveted these seas. In 1749 and 1753 (both times of peace), the French had similarly raided Turks Islands and Inagua. In 1749, they had landed cattle while erecting posts engraved with 'the continuation of the Possession of Lewis 15th'.<sup>56</sup> In its aftermath, Symmer reported that the French 'had actual Surveys made by order of Monsieur Rouille of all the Passages amongst the Bahama Islands and by that Minister's Command a Chart was published in the year 1750' (see Figure 7.1).<sup>57</sup> This map delineated the seas around the Bahamas and demonstrated 'of what consequence the possession of these islands be to the West India Trade'.<sup>58</sup> In September 1764, Brown also recalled his surprise when he was shown a map while at the Cape:

I contracted a very Intimate Acquaintance with a Gentleman who lodged in the same house with me and was one of the Engineers employed by the Court of France to make a Plan of the Cape and the Environs...to which was annexed a Map of the French Settlements on Hispaniola distinguished into thirteen different departments for the several Engineers and numbered from 1 to 13, in which Map I was told by the aforementioned Gentlemen that No. 9 was his district and I saw the Island of Heneago [Inagua] taken in with that of the Cape.<sup>59</sup>

In this passage, Brown emphasised that not only did the Court of France, under its Ministry of the Navy, sanction this project but also Inagua was explicitly included within the map of French settlements. For Brown, this cartographical

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<sup>54</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of Andrew Symmer to the Board of Trade, 21 August 1765, CO 23/16/153.

<sup>55</sup> The National Archives, Andrew Symmer to Governor Shirley, 22 August 1764, CO 23/16/56.

<sup>56</sup> The National Archives, Andrew Symmer quoted in Governor Shirley's despatch to the Secretary of State, 20 July 1764, CO 23/16/23.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant Philip Brown to Governor Shirley, 23 September 1764, CO 23/16/44.

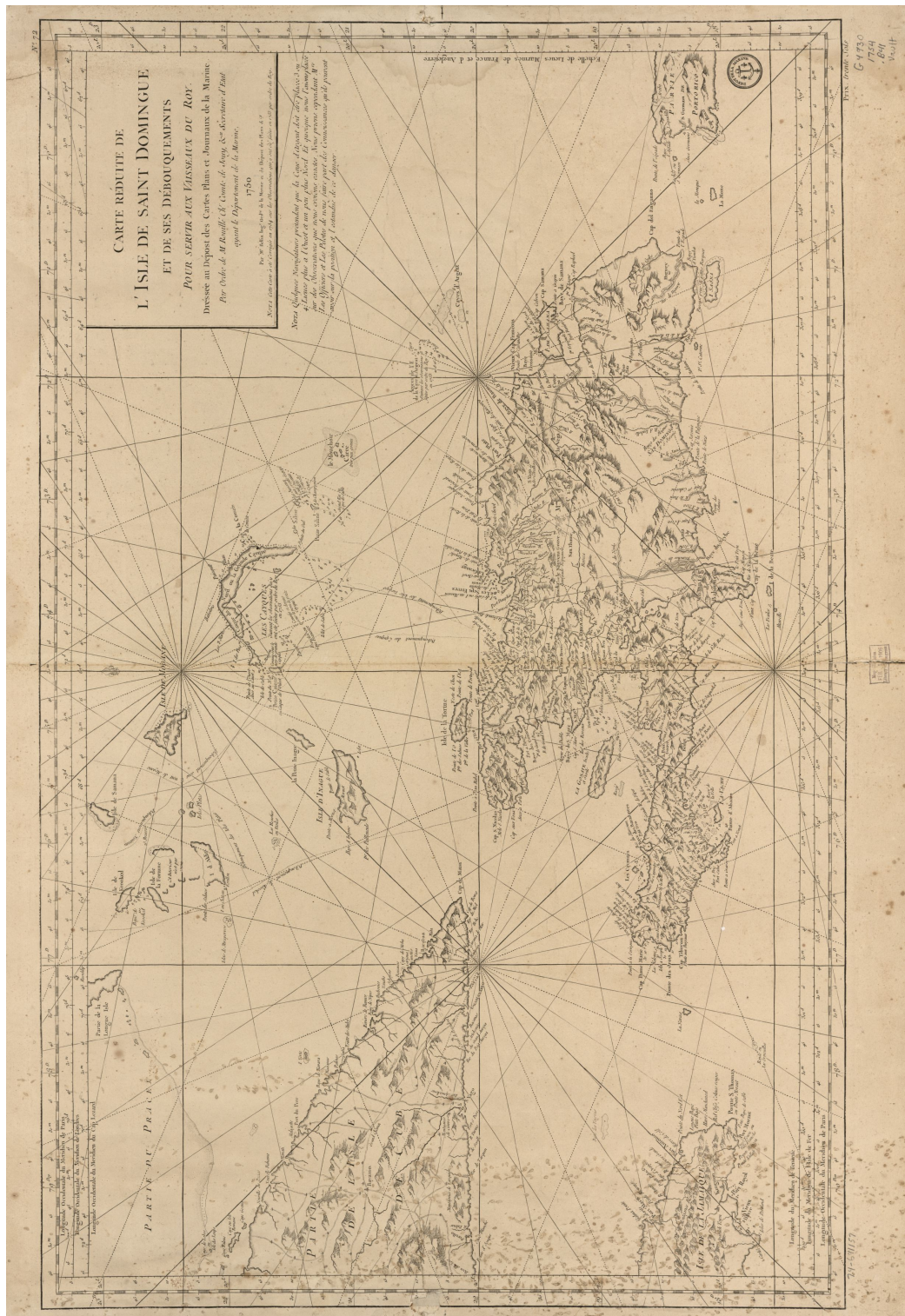


Figure 7.1: Map of Saint Domingue denoting its nearby passages including *Débouquement des Isles Turques* (the Turks Islands Passage), 1750. Jacques Nicholas Bellin, ‘Reduced map of the island of Santo Domingo and its passages to serve the ships of the king. By order of Mr. Rouillé chr. Count of Jouy, & ca. Secretary of State with the Department of the Navy, 1750’ (Paris, 1754). <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4930.ar184700/?r=0.103,0.114,1.12,0.518,0>> (22 May 2019).

representation, unashamedly disclosed by the French engineer, convinced him of France's imperial ambitions for the Bahamas region.

This concern was matched by intelligence gathered locally that was sent to the Secretary of State on the most recent fortifications at Saint Domingue.

Symmer related,

Ever since the Peace, the French have been incessantly employed in putting their West India Islands in the best Posture, both with Regard to defending their Possession in case of being attacked, and to be in a Capacity of annoying the British, if a War should suddenly happen.<sup>60</sup>

Saint Domingue, 'the Chief', presented a specific danger to Jamaica as it was '[n]ow not only capable of defending itself...but in all Probability, in case of a War's breaking out, might ruin Jamaica, before a sufficient Strength could be sent from Britain'.<sup>61</sup> In particular, the commodious harbour at the Mole by Cape Nichola was 'strongly fortifying, and a considerable Garrison placed there'.<sup>62</sup> With the 'advantage of its situation', the Jamaica trade was at risk as 'all our vessels from Jamaica are obliged to beat up as high to windward as Cape Nichola in order to secure their Passage thro' the Crooked Island Channel'.<sup>63</sup>

These pillars, instruments of allegiance, repetitive attacks, cartographic records and intelligence reports all persuaded prominent British metropolitan and colonial figures that France's invasion of Turks Islands in 1764 was anything but an isolated, opportunistic event. Though these attacks were unsuccessful, their temporal proximity and occurrence in times of peace raised significant concerns over a French 'grand design' for the region. The advantages France could accrue were obvious. Admiral Burnaby warned, Turks Islands 'consists of a Number of Keys, the Northernmost and Southernmost being the chief and lies in the Tract through which the French Ships usually pass from Hispaniola to Europe, and is therefore of great Consequence'.<sup>64</sup> When populated with British subjects, Turks Islands presented a real threat to French shipping. Conversely, if populated with French subjects, Turks Islands would become an asset to French mercantilist

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<sup>60</sup> The National Archives, Andrew Symmer quoted in Governor Shirley's despatch to the Secretary of State, 20 July 1764, CO 23/16/23.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> The National Archives, Sir William Burnaby to Philip Stephens of the Admiralty Office, 20 June 1764, CO 23/7/146.

strategy. Governor Shirley went even further. Noting the easternmost Bahamas contained ‘some of the most essential islands for commanding the Navigation of those Seas’, he argued, should the French gain a foothold there, the Out Islands would fall like dominoes, and ‘in a very short time’ the French would ‘make themselves Masters of all the Bahama Islands’.<sup>65</sup> He warned this was ‘the real Scheme of the French in their Seizure of Turks Islands...to possess themselves in the end (if they can compass it) of all the Bahama Islands’.<sup>66</sup> In that event, the sea passages shepherding the Floridian and Canadian trades would also be in jeopardy. Different threads of Britain’s mercantilist patchwork were therefore quickly woven together. Repossessing Turks Islands became synonymous with commanding the Windward Passage, countering French fortifications at the Mole and safeguarding the wider geopolitical security of the Bahamian archipelago. The sum British correspondence in and around 1764 reveals the real, rippling anxiety over maintaining Turks Islands’ possession. It demonstrates how an attack that could have been dealt with as an isolated event was reinterpreted as a much broader threat on the channelled circulation that Steinberg argues underpinned Britain’s mercantile success. Though Turks Islands were tiny, their salt ponds had attracted large numbers of British subjects to populate them, which had transformed the islands into important nodes capable of projecting power over this amphibious region. Here the sea was anything but a neutral space. It was a managed place where, as Benton attests, maritime powers increasingly paid attention ‘to strategic points, especially islands, along maritime corridors of control’.<sup>67</sup>

This was a turning point in the administrative and military organisation of the islands. British officials agreed security in this area had been compromised. They sought a two-fold solution. First, the Jamaica and Leeward Island Stations were ordered to send naval vessels on annual, routine visits to each of Britain’s Caribbean possessions to check and prevent any current or future foreign

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<sup>65</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to the Secretary of State, 20 July 1764, CO 23/16/23.

<sup>66</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to Sir William Burnaby, 1 October 1764, CO 23/16/73.

<sup>67</sup> Benton, *In Search of Sovereignty*, p. 8.

encroachments.<sup>68</sup> Second, in accordance with British ideas on possession that centred around notions of property, development, and ‘the intent to remain’, Governor Shirley and Symmer persuaded Westminster officials to consider the permanent settlement of the Out Islands as a means for securing their title.<sup>69</sup> Bolstering the salt industry would draw more Bermudians into this trade, cementing British possession. Though Symmer had been granted a provisional commission, on 14 March 1766 he was officially appointed the first Turks Islands King’s Agent.<sup>70</sup> The King’s Agent would have wide powers to protect, aid and defend the trade of the islands and those who resorted there to rake salt.<sup>71</sup> Its creation sent an unambiguous and authoritative message out into the surrounding neighbourhood of powers. Whereas previously French imperialists may have judged these islands as marginal to British concerns and amenable to French incorporation, the geopolitical climate had now demonstrably shifted.

### **The vulnerability of the Bahamas**

From thereon, Turks Islands would become one of Benton’s ‘anomalous legal spaces’ of empire – a unique watery enclave of quasi-sovereignty that put the islands at an advantage within an otherwise persistently vulnerable Bahamian archipelago.<sup>72</sup> The second part of this chapter seeks to demonstrate and explain that vulnerability as it tracks a course through the American and French Revolutionary Wars.

The American Revolutionary War ushered in a period of great instability for the Bahamas, as diplomatic protocols were suspended and privateers re-infested its waters. On 3 March 1776, an invading rebel force of ‘about three hundred Marines and Rifle Men’ attacked Nassau with a design to seize its

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<sup>68</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Shirley, 8 November 1764, CO 23/16/35.

<sup>69</sup> Seed, ‘Taking Possession and Reading Texts’, pp. 183-209.

<sup>70</sup> The National Archives, Petition of the Bahamas’ Colonial Agent George Chalmers to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 12 November 1802, BT 6/74.

<sup>71</sup> The National Archives, The Board of Trade to the King, 30 August 1766, CO 23/16/194.

<sup>72</sup> Benton, *In Search of Sovereignty*, p. 9.



gunpowder and munitions stores.<sup>73</sup> The invading force landed east of the town and after two days both Fort Montagu and Fort Nassau had fallen into their hands, leaving the town unprotected and its inhabitants in a state of capitulation. The success of this raid reflected Nassau's inadequate land and sea defences as well as the lack of military personnel. Prior to the invasion, 'the Company of the fourteenth Regiment was removed from hence, and the Savage Sloop of War recalled from this Station'.<sup>74</sup> This left the island 'in a defenceless State', without garrison troops to man the forts and the only remaining ship of war unfit to engage in defensive manoeuvres.<sup>75</sup> Governor Browne 'had not even a sick man left behind' and had to rely on mustering the militia, but 'few...were furnished with more than common Fowling Pieces'.<sup>76</sup> After Fort Montagu was abandoned, the practicality of defending Fort Nassau was assessed. Governor Browne consulted his Council and 'the majority...were of the opinion that as most of the Gun Carriages were defective, and as different kinds of Shot and other material Stores were wanting, it was not defensible'.<sup>77</sup> With the prospect of effective resistance dwindling, the gunpowder stored within the fort was shipped off the island while the ailing naval vessel was put to sea to prevent it falling into enemy hands.<sup>78</sup> Without gunpowder, effective ordinance or a ship of war, the remaining ill-equipped militiamen deserted. Nassau fell and after two weeks of occupation the American forces departed, having stripped the town of its remaining stores.

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<sup>73</sup> 'President Brown to the Secretary of State', 2 May 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 349.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> 'Governor Browne to the Secretary of State', 5 November 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 357. 'Thomas Atwood to the Secretary of State', 22 March 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 362.

<sup>77</sup> 'President Brown to the Secretary of State', 2 May 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 350.

<sup>78</sup> 'Thomas Atwood to the Secretary of State', 22 March 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), pp. 363-364.

In the aftermath, the town's defence, governance and finances were left in tatters. Thomas Atwood, an aid to the Governor, despaired, 'they have...dismantled our Forts and possessed themselves of every serviceable Part of the Cannon, Shot and Stores'.<sup>79</sup> Recognising the threat of more invasions, the Assembly passed a law for 'appointing Commissioners to put the Forts Nassau and Montague in a defensible State'.<sup>80</sup> But 'as no new Fund was provided for defraying the Expence' President Brown was 'doubtful whether anything can be done'.<sup>81</sup> Over a year later, he reported,

Nothing has been done to them [the Forts]...so that the port is in a manner open to any enemy; and as none of His Majesty's Vessels have been here since the Schooner St John left...the Armed Vessels of the Rebellious Colonies have often ventured amongst these islands.<sup>82</sup>

By 1778, the economic repercussions of the war were strangulating the public purse and the Assembly was unable to put 'His Majesty's Forts and the Island in general in the best posture of defence'.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, on 27 January 1778, Nassau was attacked again. A 'party of marines' from an American ship of war landed and 'marched silently to Fort Nassau and took Possession of it'.<sup>84</sup> Upon threatening to fire on the town, the inhabitants capitulated, and after seizing several ships, the 'Americans...spiked up the Guns, destroyed the little Powder that was in the Fort, and sailed with their Prizes'.<sup>85</sup> Nassau's need for a detachment of soldiers or a sloop of war was evident.

However, when troops were sent, they were often in such a state of ill health that their capability was much reduced. As J R McNeill has convincingly argued, from the late eighteenth century Caribbean ports were conducive to the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 364-365.

<sup>80</sup> 'President Brown to the Secretary of State', 2 May 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 351.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> 'President Brown to the Secretary of State', 10 May 1776, in John Brown, Montefort Browne, George Germain et al, 'The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (1925), p. 359.

<sup>83</sup> The National Archives, Address of the Bahamas Assembly, 1778, CO 23/24/35.

<sup>84</sup> The National Archives, Governor Gambier to the Secretary of State, 25 February 1778, CO 23/24/22.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



spread of pathogenic forces, particularly yellow fever and malaria. Differential immunity ensured these diseases were ‘partisan’, making incoming British soldiers and sailors tragically vulnerable.<sup>86</sup> In April 1782, Governor Maxwell complained of the arrival of reinforcements who were by his description 170 invalids.<sup>87</sup> In September 1797, during the French Revolutionary Wars, the state of the troops sent to the Bahamas was even worse. President Hunt lamented, ‘The Condition of the 32nd Regiment in Garrison here is wretched beyond description’.<sup>88</sup> This put the colony at expense it could ill-afford building hospitals while several inhabitants lost their lives to yellow fever, including the Governor’s. By the close of the eighteenth century, the problem of securing Nassau’s defence had rippled down the ages.

If Nassau struggled to defend itself, the problem of defending the Out Islands was severe. As Geoffrey Ward states, throughout the eighteenth century, France subscribed to *guerre de course* in its conflicts with Britain.<sup>89</sup> By disrupting the flow of mercantilism, these attacks on commerce ‘became a practical means of forcing an opponent to come to terms’.<sup>90</sup> In the 1790s, *guerre de course* was extensively deployed in the Bahamas as privateers sought to project French *imperium* into these seas. Memorials to the Governor from pleading planters and merchants in the Out Islands were numerous. In July 1794, a memorial deplored the ‘depredations of the French Privateers among the Islands to Windward’.<sup>91</sup> In particular the subscribers mentioned a recent ‘arrival of another Schooner from Charleston called the *Naibonnoise* carrying 12 Guns and fifty Men’.<sup>92</sup> An instrument of protest sworn to by William Elliot and John Bullard brings to life what *guerre de course* meant in Bahamian waters. These two men were the captain and first mate of the Bahamian vessel, *Adventure*,

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<sup>86</sup> J R McNeill, ‘Yellow Jack and Geopolitics: Environment, Epidemics, and the Struggles for Empire in the American Tropics, 1650-1825’, *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 18 No. 3 (Apr., 2004), p 11.

<sup>87</sup> The National Archives, Governor Maxwell to the Secretary of State, 17 April 1782, CO 23/25/51.

<sup>88</sup> The National Archives, President Hunt to the Secretary of State, 8 September 1797, CO 23/36 f. 104.

<sup>89</sup> Geoffrey Ward, ‘Nowhere is Perfect’, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> James Davey, *In Nelson’s Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2015), p. 231.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives, A Memorial of Planters and Merchants of the Bahamas and those interested in the Bahamas to Governor Dunmore, 23 July 1794, CO 23/34 f. 62.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

which had sailed from New Providence with a cargo ‘loaded with provisions and other supplies for Crooked Island and the Caicos’.<sup>93</sup> Ten days into their journey, at three o’clock in the afternoon, their fortunes turned: ‘a schooner [the *Naibonnoise*]...under English Colours’ bore down on them and on coming up ‘fired a shot at the *Adventure* and hoisted the National Flag of France’.<sup>94</sup> Outnumbered, the Bahamian crew were detained until ‘eleven o’clock at night when they put’ Elliot and Bullard ‘in the *Adventure*’s Boat about ten or eleven miles from the shore, and dismissed them, after plundering every thing but the Cloathes on their backs’.<sup>95</sup> On board *Adventure* were seven enslaved persons, but only five were reported alive upon capture and they were seized along with the cargo. For these enslaved persons, their lives were more uncertain than ever; for the owner of *Adventure* and its cargo, this was an acute financial loss; for the Crooked and Caicos Islanders, their food supply did not arrive. This singular event was often repeated, in various forms, across the seaways of the exposed and vulnerable Out Islands. It was French naval mercantilism in offensive action.

Planters and merchants demanded protection but Governors struggled to oblige. In July 1793, Governor Dunmore wrote to the Secretary of State,

I can assure you that on the Out Islands, they have neither Arms, Ammunition or Accoutrements of any kind; I have distributed among them what could possibly be spared, and there are not now above four hundred Stand of Arms in His Majesty’s Magazines, and it would require at least Two Thousand Stand with Ammunition for the different Islands.<sup>96</sup>

Here Governor Dunmore revealed the gross discrepancy between the needs of the Out Islands and the availability of resources in New Providence. It discloses a colonial hierarchy whereby Nassau, as the colony’s trading hub, was prioritised. The overall picture was of a provincial government unable to administer effectively beyond its island precinct.

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<sup>93</sup> The National Archives, Sworn Testimony of William Elliot and John Bullard, 21 July 1794, CO 23/34 f. 62.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> The National Archives, Governor Dunmore to the Secretary of State, 17 July 1793, CO 23/32 f. 124.

*Administering an elongated archipelago*

This was partly due to the challenge of administering an elongated archipelago like the Bahamas. Governors were keen to point this out. To perform his duties in 1781, Governor Maxwell mused that visiting the Out Islands ‘will necessarily call the Governor often from the seat of Government’.<sup>97</sup> The reality of this sparked an on-going debate around funds available for the service. These funds were restricted to an annuity of £700 annually and were applied indiscriminately across the British Caribbean, despite the colonies’ varied topographies. In practice, the allowance, quite literally, did not go far enough. Governor Dunmore reported in April 1790 that he had to cut his tour short because of a lack of funds. While he was able to transmit ‘a State of these Islands, so far as my own observation goes, of those I have visited’, he was ‘for the present deprived of the means of visiting any more of these Islands, as My Lord Commissioners of His Majesty’s Treasury complained much of the expense’.<sup>98</sup> Without visiting all the inhabited and habitable islands himself, the Governor had to rely on second- and third-hand accounts to report on the state of the colony’s defences.

Frustrated, he tried to explain to the Treasury the geographical features of the Bahamas, which made hiring suitable vessels comparatively more expensive:

The extent of this Government be at least 400 Leagues and all the Islands that are settled being to Windward of this place requires a Vessel of some size to beat up that Distance in those Seas, and a larger one than those employed by the Governors of the West India Islands, who have but short trips to make and that but seldom.<sup>99</sup>

The scale and nature of the Bahamian archipelago demanded special consideration. The Bahamas archipelago consisted of over 700 islands within ‘a dangerous sea’ full of hazardous reefs and sand bars.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, because of the

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<sup>97</sup> The National Archives, Governor Maxwell to the Secretary of State, 16 March 1781, CO 37/22/26.

<sup>98</sup> The National Archives, Governor Dunmore to the Secretary of State, 5 April 1790, CO 23/30 f. 198.

<sup>99</sup> The National Archives, Governor Dunmore to the Treasury, 16 February 1790, CO 23/30 f. 200.

<sup>100</sup> Daniel McKinnen, ‘A General Description of the Bahama Islands’, in Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies, Illustrated by an Atlas, and Embellished with a Portrait of the Author, to which is added*

direction of trade winds, sailing southeast along the archipelago was a daunting undertaking. On the rare occasion a Governor *did* visit Turks Islands, it could take him six weeks to make the trip.<sup>101</sup> Such wind conditions, treacherous reefs, and extensive distances, all conspired to make navigating around the Bahamas a cumbersome, expensive enterprise. Moreover, by 1812, the annuity was stopped altogether.<sup>102</sup> Subsequently, Governors would need to rely on boats from His Majesty's visiting ships, which were seldom on the station, or borrow from individuals whose small vessels were designed for wrecking and turtling.<sup>103</sup>

As a result, Bahamian Governors often failed to visit islands under their jurisdiction, and the links between them remained poor. This was not conducive to centralised management in peacetime let alone during war. Together, these examples indicate the real challenge of effecting good government over an elongated archipelago that was 'extensive, numerous, desolate and detached'.<sup>104</sup>

#### *The hierarchical deployment of military resources*

However, the archipelagic environment alone cannot explain the Bahamas' persistent vulnerability, as with adequate resources this could have been mitigated. It is necessary to understand why the Bahamas did not receive sufficient military resources to combat these geographical challenges.

In the British Caribbean, the defence of colonies rested primarily not on garrisons and forts but on naval vessels. As one Secretary of State indicated, 'it is upon the Superiority of the Fleets of Great Britain that the Defence and Security of her Colonies ever have, and ever must principally depend'.<sup>105</sup> As Britain's imperial possessions stretched across the Atlantic, defending 'every Bay and Creek' with fortified land defences 'where it is possible an Enemy may land' was

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*a General Description of the Bahama Islands, By Daniel McKinnen, Esq., in four volumes* (4 vols, Philadelphia: James Humphries, 1806), 4, pp. 343-344.

<sup>101</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to the Secretary of State, 2 April 1770, CO 23/8/105.

<sup>102</sup> The National Archives, Governor Cameron to the Secretary of State, 10 June 1812, CO 23/59 f. 162.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> The National Archives, The Address and Memorial of the British Merchants settled in the Bahamas, 16 April 1785, CO 37/23 f. 5.

<sup>105</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Shirley, 8 November 1764, CO 23/16/35.

simply unfeasible.<sup>106</sup> Preference was to invest in a mobile navy that could be deployed as, when, and where needed, responding flexibly to events. While this made sense on an imperial level, it could put individual islands at risk.

This was apparent during the French Revolutionary Wars when large expeditionary forces were sent to specific islands and seaways of the Caribbean. At that time, as Michael Duffy has shown, the Caribbean was by no means an inconsequential sideshow to a European war.<sup>107</sup> Britain's decision to engage in the Caribbean rested on mercantilism's strong association between naval power and commerce. A Secretary of State reflected, 'navigation and commerce are inseparably connected, and that nation must be the most powerful maritime state which possesses the most extensive commerce'.<sup>108</sup> Underpinning this logic was 'the belief that the navy could deliver victory' which, for James Davey, 'had been a cornerstone of British strategy since at least the 1730s'.<sup>109</sup> Such rationale propelled large expeditions to the Caribbean but in their geographic specificity, they reveal a bias towards protecting the sugar trade that, in turn, proffered enhanced defence for certain islands. The title of Duffy's book, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, is telling in this respect. While recognising other commodities' contribution, the investments and profits in the sugar trade were central to Duffy's depiction of the Caribbean as 'a precarious money-box'.<sup>110</sup> According to Christer Petley and John McAleer, 'the sugar islands of the Caribbean remained the most important colonial possessions within the British empire until after the end of the Napoleonic Wars' and as a result the protection of those islands were 'a key priority for British statesmen'.<sup>111</sup> With prominent leaders attaching more importance to Britain's sugar colonies during the war, it is unsurprising they received better protection. Because the Bahamas lacked inherent economic value in and of themselves, they were inescapably placed lower down the colonial

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>108</sup> Henry Dundas, the Secretary of State, quoted in Ibid, p. 386.

<sup>109</sup> Davey, *In Nelson's Wake*, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower*, pp. 3-44.

<sup>111</sup> Christer Petley and John McAleer, 'Introduction: The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic', in John McAleer and Christer Petley (eds), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 14.

hierarchy; a hierarchy that informed a geographically specific deployment of military resources that contoured around the sugar trade.

This protective bias is notable in the erratic naval support the Bahamas received during the 1790s. In the first instance, many inhabitants argued they needed more than one sloop of war in the Bahamas at all times. Petitions on the subject were common. In April 1795, inhabitants of Crooked Island appealed to the Governor expressing this concern. At the time, HMS *Scorpion* was on the station, but according to the subscribers, ‘she has such a range, that it is out of her power to grant a sufficient protection to the commerce of Great Britain in this Channel’.<sup>112</sup> Rather than overstretch the *Scorpion*’s ‘force-field’ capacities and compromise the security of the whole, they suggested a further sloop of war should be stationed in the eastern region for their protection. Governors tended to agree. In May 1797, Governor Forbes wrote to the Secretary of State on the colony’s estimated naval requirements underscoring the ‘necessity’ of there being not one or two but three sloops of war on the Bahamas station.<sup>113</sup> He recommended that each sloop cruise a particular passage: one ‘among the Windward Islands of the Bahamas and the Crooked Passage’, ‘another off the Coast of Cuba and through the Old Bahamas Straits’, and ‘a third should remain in our [Nassau’s] Harbour’.<sup>114</sup> The only way the Bahamas could be protected effectively was through control of its sea passages.

Yet, in reality, the Bahamas were often without a *single* sloop of war. On 6 September 1777, a year after the American attack on Nassau in 1776, Governor Browne reported he had written to both Jamaica and New York seeking aid, but ‘none of His Majesty’s Ships or Vessels have yet come hither’.<sup>115</sup> As a result, ‘armed vessels of the Rebels’ continued to ‘infest these islands’.<sup>116</sup> In June 1793, Governor Dunmore testified to ‘the apprehension’ amongst the inhabitants ‘created by what they think a want of attention to their safety, in not a single

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<sup>112</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of Crooked Island Inhabitants to Governor Dunmore, 8 April 1795, CO 23/34 f. 49.

<sup>113</sup> The National Archives, Governor Forbes to the Secretary of State, 4 May 1797, CO 23/36 f. 21.

<sup>114</sup> The National Archives, Governor Forbes to the Secretary of State, undated, c. May 1797, CO 23/36 f. 19.

<sup>115</sup> The National Archives, Governor Brown to the Secretary of State, 6 September 1777, CO 23/24/1.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

sloop of war being sent here for their protection'.<sup>117</sup> These complaints form a portion of a much larger source base, but they suggest a growing discontent emerging between the civil establishment and the Admiralty over the colony's sea defences. As Sian Williams explains, the 'visible presence in Caribbean waters of these [naval] ships...demonstrated to local colonists Britain's significant investment in their protection'.<sup>118</sup> Conversely, their absence was an ominous sign.

Without adequate naval protection, the geographical obstacles inherent within the Bahamian archipelago became insurmountable problems. These factors had a dynamic relationship with each other that was mutually reinforcing. As a result, the Out Islands were some of the most precariously placed in the British Caribbean. Nassau could not provide for their adequate protection. In a mercantilist construction of ocean-space, it resolutely failed to project any sort of 'force-field' over this amphibious region. As the easternmost islands of this chain, Turks Islands were acutely vulnerable, but they benefited from the fact they did not have to rely on Nassau for protection. They could and would project their own 'force-field'.

### **The defence of Turks Islands**

When Turks Islands were granted a King's Agent in the aftermath of the French attack in 1764, their position within the British Empire changed. No longer an inconsequential margin of the Bahamas, these most out of 'Out Islands' began to perform like one of Benton's 'enclaves' standing sentry at the northern entrance of the Windward Passage where 'layers of [British] authority thickened'.<sup>119</sup> The British Government's intention for these islands was clear. In their pursuit of salt, Bermudian salt gatherers had inadvertently changed these once deserted islands into potentially strategic nodes. With the protection of a King's Agent, their wealth and population would only increase, helping Turks Islands act as an

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<sup>117</sup> The National Archives, Governor Dunmore to the Secretary of State, 25 June 1793, CO 23/32 f. 116.

<sup>118</sup> Sian Williams, 'The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society during the Eighteenth Century', in John McAleer and Christer Petley (eds), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 31.

<sup>119</sup> Benton, *In Search of Sovereignty*, p. 32.

authoritative centre from which a ‘force-field’ could be projected out over the nearby Windward Passage. By default, the islands would also emerge as an anomalous legal space, in which the King’s Agent had discretionary powers to implement imperial orders, utilise his diplomatic influence and corral the islands’ growing internal resources for their defence. In an archipelago dogged by vulnerability, Turks Islands would become a small watery enclave with political and economic leverage. This was seen most noticeably during the French Revolutionary Wars.

In 1789, Alexander Murray was appointed King’s Agent.<sup>120</sup> For Turks Islands, the King’s Agent was a lifeline for their defence and placed them in an advantageous position amongst the Out Islands. Unlike neighbouring Caicos Islands or Crooked Island, Turks Islands had an official on the spot designated for their exclusive protection that was granted authority by the King. In the 1790s, although Turks Islands were prey to multiple depredations from privateers, the position and policies of the King’s Agent largely protected them from the ruin and total abandonment witnessed on other islands.

For one, the position of King’s Agent conferred direct access to the Secretary of State and Bahamas Governor. This access provided an open, and expected, channel of communication through which the King’s Agent was required to methodically report on the state of the islands under his command. His position ensured that doors to influential decision-makers were open. Moreover, it was a position of trust. This trust engendered great responsibility but it was also highly empowering. Magisterial recognition for the King’s Agent rippled down the colonial governance structure, as neighbouring Governors and visiting Commanders of the Admiralty learned from the King’s example to address his Agent with the respect his position conferred. It drove the Secretary of State to insist the Bahamas Governor make the King’s Agent a permanent member of his Council so that he could benefit from the latter’s insights.<sup>121</sup> Most importantly, it ensured ministers in London never disregarded the advice and warnings of the King’s Agent when his despatches landed on their desks. Not

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<sup>120</sup> The National Archives, Commission of King’s Agent Alexander Murray, 28 July 1789, BT 6/74.

<sup>121</sup> The National Archives, Letter from Secretary of State Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley of the Bahamas, 4 August 1769, BT 6/74.



many London ministers could boast of the specialist knowledge in salt production that the King's Agent espoused. This combination of improved access to power while being in a position of trust helped the King's Agent acquire a level of influence other Out Island residents lacked.

Secondly, the King's Agent was able to take independent steps on the spot to improve the islands' sea defences at critical moments. In September 1794, Murray reported to the Secretary of State that 'some time ago' the Bahamian Governor had been obliged to recall from Turks Islands the detachment of the 47th Regiment sent for their protection.<sup>122</sup> 'Since which time', Murray lamented, 'we have been under constant apprehension from the Enemy's privateers; but lately they have been much more alarming than usual, as they have taken a number of Vessels belonging to the Bahama Islands just leeward of us'.<sup>123</sup> At this time Murray may have been referring to nearby Long Island and Crooked Island whose inhabitants were reportedly cut off from the rest of the Bahamas by French privateers.<sup>124</sup> But whereas those Out Islanders had no authority or leverage to raise sea defences, Murray was able to take direct ameliorative action. In response to mounting security concerns, Murray 'thought it necessary...to hire an Armed Vessel on the Government's Account'.<sup>125</sup> This vessel, the armed cutter *Victory*, was fitted with ten barrage guns, three pounders and manned by fifteen men including their captain, Archibald Graham.<sup>126</sup> It was for the sole protection of Turks Islands and it began its employment on 7 September 1794. This was the same day Murray wrote to the Secretary of State informing him of these plans. In fact, the Duke of Portland did not receive Murray's despatch until three months after *Victory* had formally commenced its activities.<sup>127</sup> That this arrangement could be orchestrated on the spot, without needing prior approval from London, is testimony to the authority Murray's

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<sup>122</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 7 September 1794, CO 23/33 f. 129.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> The National Archives, A Memorial of Planters and Merchants of the Bahamas and those interested in the Bahamas to Governor Dunmore, 23 July 1794, CO 23/34 f. 62.

<sup>125</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 7 September 1794, CO 23/33 f. 129.

<sup>126</sup> The National Archives, Estimate of Expenses for Armed Cutter *Victory*, undated, c. September 1794, CO 23/33 f. 131.

<sup>127</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 7 September 1794, CO 23/33 f. 129.

position commanded. There was no doubt, in Graham or Murray's mind, that the Treasury would retrospectively honour these payments.

It helped the Bahamas Governor supported Murray's actions. When Murray drew on the Treasury for the first payment of *Victory*, he did so with the 'advice and approbation of the Governor General of the Bahama Islands'.<sup>128</sup> In so doing, the King's Agent was able to take confident steps to improve the islands' defences, knowing he had the support of the local Governor should disagreements with the metropolitan government arise. This was important because it was an expense the metropolitan government did not approve of. As early as September 1795, the Secretary of State was reprimanding Governor Dunmore for 'the very large amount of expences already incurred by your Lordship's Orders for the service denominated by your Lordship "The Department of Gallies and other Armed Vessels etc"''.<sup>129</sup> Governor Dunmore was ordered to discontinue their employment with immediate effect and Murray was sent a copy of the same despatch for his 'future guidance and direction with respect to the vessel [*Victory*] in Question'.<sup>130</sup> The minister wanted *Victory*, and any other armed vessels, discharged.

But this did not happen. Bills for *Victory* continued to arrive at the Treasury until 1799 when it was no longer fit for service. In its stead, Murray hired the armed schooner *Admiral Duncan*. This was a much larger vessel. *Admiral Duncan* had 'Ten Double Three Pounders and two six Pounders for Chase Guns, Thirty men and Twenty Stand of small arms'.<sup>131</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Bahamas Governor reported 'the expense to Government on this occasion is very considerably increased', but since the situation in nearby Saint Domingue was increasingly volatile, Governor Dowdeswell approved of its hiring.<sup>132</sup> The Secretary of State learned of this four months after *Admiral Duncan* began its

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<sup>128</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 9 June 1795, CO 23/34 f. 75.

<sup>129</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Dunmore, 5 September 1795, CO 23/34 f. 82.

<sup>130</sup> The National Archives, Under-Secretary of State to King's Agent Alexander Murray, 5 September 1795, CO 23/34 f. 83.

<sup>131</sup> The National Archives, Governor Dowdeswell to the Secretary of State, 17 July 1799, CO 23/37 f. 242.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

hire and immediately called for its discharge.<sup>133</sup> However, like his predecessors, Governor Dowdeswell found imperative reasons to keep the armed vessel employed.<sup>134</sup> This direct refutation of ministerial orders reveals how far Turks Islands had come: no longer overlooked Out Islands lacking intrinsic jurisdiction, they were an authoritative centre in which armed vessels could be hired on the spot and subsequently charged to the Treasury in London.

Moreover, evidence suggests the presence of these armed vessels worked. When Murray was called to defend his actions, he insisted the employment of *Victory* had been ‘absolutely necessary’ and attended with ‘good consequence’.<sup>135</sup> He related a case concerning the ‘capture of one of the Enemy’s privateers by His Majesty’s Sloop of War, the *Scorpion*’.<sup>136</sup> Upon an examination of the privateer’s logbook, its original intent was revealed. It had planned to join forces with another privateer to ‘cut out all the British Vessels’ at Turks Islands.<sup>137</sup> However, they were put off, deterred by ‘the protection afforded by the appearance of [an] Armed Vessel and a small Battery on shore’.<sup>138</sup> The efficacy of this deterrence was the reason why Out Islanders regularly appealed to the Governor and Admiralty for vessels to cruise the region for their joint security. They understood the need for British armed vessels to combat France’s *guerre de course*. However, they were often disappointed. The fact Turks Islands had an armed vessel for its *exclusive* protection was therefore quite extraordinary.

Thirdly, the King’s Agent was able to marshal internal resources to safeguard the islands’ security. By the late 1790s, the wealth of the salt industry had vastly increased, aided by the formal protection of the King’s Agent. When Murray began his superintendence in 1790, there were ‘only from 500 to 600

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<sup>133</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Dowdeswell, 20 September 1799, CO 23/37 f. 249.

<sup>134</sup> The National Archives, The Secretary of State to Governor Dowdeswell, January 1800, CO 23/39 f. 25. The National Archives, Governor Dowdeswell to the Secretary of State, 1 May 1800, CO 23/39 f. 121.

<sup>135</sup> The National Archives, King’s Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 9 June 1795, CO 23/34 f. 75.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

people, inhabiting some miserable Huts on a sandy uncultivated Desert'.<sup>139</sup> Accordingly, Crown revenue from salt was about £400 annually, while the amount of bushels produced averaged 350,000.<sup>140</sup> Eleven years later, Murray could boast the population had increased to 1,300.<sup>141</sup> Crown revenue had increased ten-fold and the amount of salt produced had almost doubled.<sup>142</sup> These figures suggest Turks Islands had become a more prosperous and populous watery enclave whose population not only had a greater stake in the islands' protection but could also contribute more towards their defence. In 1796, when ordnance supplies were obtained from Jamaica the inhabitants agreed to pay for the erection of a water battery to house them.<sup>143</sup> It was sworn by oath that the salt gatherers would 'bind' themselves 'to pay the sum of two Dollars (when called upon) for each such Slave...[they] may receive in his Majesty's Ponds towards liquidating the public debts'.<sup>144</sup> Work began immediately on the erection of batteries and by 1799 there were three protecting the principle landing places.<sup>145</sup> In 1803, Murray estimated the inhabitants had defrayed 'upwards of 27,000 Dollars...among themselves by general assessment, which Sum they expended in the execution of Forts, buying canon, Labour etc'.<sup>146</sup> This capacity to raise revenue from the inhabitants was a real advantage for Turks Islands' defence.

The King's Agent was also able to encourage loyal behaviour from the inhabitants through the introduction of wartime regulations. In 1795, he successfully persuaded the white inhabitants to sign an agreed set of directives that would govern their conduct for the duration of the French Revolutionary Wars. In previous decades, the islands had often been abandoned quickly in response to foreign incursions. The regulations were therefore designed 'as an

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<sup>139</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1796, CO 23/34 f. 108.

<sup>144</sup> The National Archives, Sworn Oath of Turks Islanders, 10 February 1796, CO 23/39 f. 347.

<sup>145</sup> The National Archives, Account of Ordnance at Turks Islands, 23 July 1799, CO 23/39 f. 350.

<sup>146</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

encouragement to Individuals to stay and defend the same'.<sup>147</sup> In their operation, they employed the proverbial carrot and stick. As pond shares were the resource to be coveted at Turks Islands, these were the bargaining chips. The first article promised an extra share for every white man who swore he would not 'quit the island should the War continue' during the salt season. At the same time he committed himself to any necessary guard duties and his enslaved to any labour the defensive fortifications required.<sup>148</sup> However, the penalty of not conforming to the first article was revealed in the second. If a white man should 'quit the Island in the hour of danger', he would forego the right to any shares the following salt season.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, the third article decreed that if any slaveholder denied the use of his enslaved for the defence of the islands, the pond shares attached to those enslaved persons would be forfeited. These regulations were kept in place until the termination of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1802. They reveal how pond shares were manipulated to become powerful tools for enforcing a sense of duty amongst the inhabitants, meeting the islands' labour requirements and deterring their abandonment during attacks.

Finally, Murray was able to raise an effective militia on the islands. In July 1790, through his 'influence on the inhabitants', Murray raised three companies consisting of two white companies and one black company 'without Government being at any expense'.<sup>150</sup> In total, this encapsulated 150 men.<sup>151</sup> They 'were all regularly disciplined and trained to arms, taking nightly their tour of duty at the different Batteries'.<sup>152</sup> In theory and in practice, they swore to do their duty. As Murray related, in 1797,

The Vengeance, a French Ship of War of 50 Guns, came for the express purpose of capturing or destroying the property in Turks Islands but from

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<sup>147</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray's Wartime Regulations, c. 1796, CO 23/34 f. 110.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 12 February 1800, CO 23/39 f. 345.

<sup>151</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>152</sup> The National Archives, King's Agent Alexander Murray to the Secretary of State, 12 February 1800, CO 23/39 f. 345.

the Resistance made by the embodied Companies and the State of the Batteries she was compelled to steer off.<sup>153</sup>

Murray went on to testify that ‘several other attempts have been made from St Domingo but owing to the regular discipline of the Inhabitants they universally proved abortive’.<sup>154</sup>

Accordingly, these companies and batteries were successful in projecting a ‘force-field’ from the land over the sea to repel enemy invasions. In the 1790s, the men who manned and funded these defensive measures owed their presence and wealth at Turks Islands to the salt industry. Without salt, the population and prosperity of these islands would never have been significant. As it was, these manned companies and publicly funded batteries, alongside wartime regulations and armed vessels, ensured the islands were never successfully attacked during the 1790s.

This is not to argue Turks Islands were invulnerable after 1766. During the late eighteenth century they were attacked on several occasions. For example, in 1778, ‘A French Vessel of War made an Attack on Turks Islands...and kept up a continual Fire on the Town upwards of Six Hours’.<sup>155</sup> A day later, when most of the inhabitants had already abandoned the islands, a second vessel arrived and ‘landed about Sixty Marines’, plundered the town and seized a Bermuda sloop before departing.<sup>156</sup> In 1781, a ‘small Fleet from the Cape’ again attacked Turks Islands and ‘carried off all the Salt’.<sup>157</sup> Finally, in February 1783, three French ships of war armed with 150 soldiers landed and temporarily took control of the islands.<sup>158</sup> These disruptive attacks indicate how, like other Out Islands, Turks Islands could at times be overtly vulnerable. However, after 1766 their relative vulnerability was consistently less and by the French Revolutionary

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<sup>153</sup> The National Archives, Memorial of the Turks Islands King’s Agent Alexander Murray to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 10 January 1803, BT 6/74.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State, 22 September 1778, CO 23/24/24.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> The National Archives, Governor Maxwell to the Secretary of State, 1 February 1781, CO 23/25/19.

<sup>158</sup> Horatio Nelson, ‘Letter from Horatio Nelson to Rear Admiral Lord Hood, 9 March 1793’, in Nicholas Harris Nicolas (ed.), *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson with notes by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, Vol. 1, 1777-1794* (7 vols, London: Henry Colburn Publisher, 1844), 1, pp. 73-74.

Wars the balance had decidedly shifted. In these late years of the eighteenth century, Turks Islands had become an authoritative centre, a watery enclave, radiating a 'force-field' and no longer reliant on Nassau for protection.

## **Conclusion**

During the mid-eighteenth century, Turks Islands emerged as a point of interest for French mercantilism. In an era when resources were considered finite and trade was a zero-sum game, maintaining control of channelled circulation through commanding discrete ocean corridors was key. As a result, ocean-space was militarised and islands located next to these waterways were often drawn into the fray, becoming local centres of authority from which an empire could project its *imperium* or 'force-field' seawards. For this reason, in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War France sought to improve the security of its Saint-Domingue sugar trade by reinforcing its presence along the Windward Passage. At its northern entrance lay Turks Islands. Uninhabited, these were not necessarily a threat, though their hazardous reefs would always be minded. However, the annual gathering of seafaring Bermudians at Turks Islands posed an increasing hazard to French shipping. The French attack of 1764 was therefore a calculated risk to incorporate these islands into the French Empire, in order to better command and channel French trade.

However, French mercantilism did not exist in a vacuum; in attacking Turks Islands it antagonised a similarly aggressive and competitive British mercantilism. In the aftermath, French belligerence inadvertently propelled Turks Islands onto a trajectory French imperialists would have least preferred. The British Government decided its geopolitical security in this region had been intolerably compromised and took an unprecedented step. Turks Islands were awarded a unique legal status under the administration of a King's Agent, whose work would bolster the salt trade, settlement and protection of these islands.

From thereon, Turks Islands became one of Benton's enclaves of empire – an anomalous legal space in which local authority thickened and from which Steinberg's 'force-field' could be projected seawards over the Windward Passage. Strengthening imperial authority at Turks Islands in this way was necessary because the Bahamas region as a whole was and would remain

vulnerable. Through a combination of innate geographical challenges and contrasting naval priorities, the Out Islands were some of the most precariously placed within the British Caribbean. However, the appointment of a King's Agent, his policies, and the subsequent development of Turks Islands, all helped to enrich and protect these islands from future foreign encroachment. Though they would never be invulnerable nor receive the same level of protection as the sugar islands, Turks Islands did benefit from enhanced military defences. This put them at a demonstrative advantage within the Bahamian archipelago.

In telling this story, this chapter has raised two points about the spatiality of European mercantilism. First, it has highlighted the tension that could exist between metropolitan and provincial governments over the hierarchical distribution of military resources within an empire that prioritised the protection of sugar islands. During the French Revolutionary Wars, the theatre of war drove expeditionary forces to certain areas of the Caribbean that de-prioritised others. Protecting the sugar trade of the British Empire, and seizing that of her enemies, made strategic sense. But it could and did leave individual islands at risk. In these war-torn years, the uneven patchwork of mercantilist empire was starkly revealed. The British Empire was not a monolithic empire based on territorial possession but a variegated, lumpy empire seeking command of specific strategic zones, informed by matters of trade.

Second, this chapter has demonstrated the value of using Turks Islands as a case study for illuminating a socially constructed Caribbean Sea. In this increasingly crowded inter-imperial region, the ocean was anything but an unregulated, unmanaged *space*. Rather, overlapping and transecting sea-lanes became highly contested *places* as British and French mercantile interests jostled for their command. Here warfare was not 'an independent variable' but a direct result of mercantilism's competitive edge. The French attack on Turks Islands in 1764 should be viewed in this light. Sitting at the watery crossroads of the Windward Passage, Turks Islands were valuable for their potential to project *imperium* over this nearby passage. While the French recognised this and sought to capitalise, it was the British who would ultimately benefit.

This chapter has narrated a story about the construction of British mercantilism at Turks Islands in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, there were moments when British mercantilism failed in this sphere.



The final chapter of this thesis will address a time in Turks Islands' history when salt crossed imperial boundaries in order for their inhabitants to obtain perhaps the most important commodity of all: food.

## Chapter 8: Salt and Survival: Provisioning Bermuda and Turks Islands in the American Revolutionary Era, c. 1775-1789

### Introduction

Turks Islands were some of the most barren islands of the British Caribbean. Unlike the sugar islands, the salt islands were infertile from discovery and could provide little by means of a provision ground system. Once drawn into the Atlantic world, those who lived in this saline environment relied on inter-island networks for food and looked to Bermudian merchants for what they could not grow or produce. At the same time, Bermuda's inhabitants equally depended on the sale of salt for their sustenance. Their merchants collected it from Turks Islands, carried it to North American markets, and traded it for foodstuffs including Indian corn, rice, salted meat and fish. These consumables were taken first to Bermuda, where they were partially unloaded, and the remainder conveyed to Turks Islands in a supply chain that reflected their entwined history. But it was not invulnerable. Like all Caribbean islands, Bermuda and Turks Islands were small island territories whose exposure to external shocks only grew as their populations expanded: any exterior force that disrupted their provision networks could endanger their food security. This chapter will explore that vulnerability during a period of intense geopolitical instability and food scarcity: the period just before, during and after the American Revolution.

When faced with food insecurity, John Bohstedt has argued that many communities respond by activating a 'politics of provisions'.<sup>1</sup> In a politics of provisions, struggles erupt between rulers and ruled over food when shortages arise. These struggles can take many different forms. The most extreme is food rioting but they can include smuggling, petitioning, and looting. In a politics of provisions, it is not often the poorest, most hungry, who protest. It is never solely about hunger. Instead, whether or not people are motivated to protest, and whether or not they are successful in their efforts, depends on their shared moral economy, the customary traditions of a place, the historic relationship local rulers

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<sup>1</sup> John Bohstedt, 'Food Riots and the Politics of Provisions in World History', *Institute of Development Studies Working Paper*, Vol. 2014 No. 444 (May, 2014), pp. 2-31.

had with those they ruled, and the types and strength of connections that united different sections of society.

This chapter will use this analytical concept to break down the factors that underpinned Bermuda and Turks Islands' politics of provisions during the American revolutionary period. It will argue that food scarcity in these islands activated a politics of provisions that repeatedly undercut the mercantile system as it saw a salt-provisions trade largely endure. In so doing, Bermudian salt traders and salt gatherers won a significant comparative advantage over their sugar island brethren: they obtained food more regularly, and in quantity, to avoid the worst effects of famine, starvation, and death. While the American Revolution has often been classified as a 'disaster' for the sugar islands, for the salt islands it proved a highly disruptive, but not calamitous, event.<sup>2</sup>

In pursuit of this argument, this chapter emphasises colonists as the consumers, rather than producers, of goods. As Bertie Mandelblatt has pointed out for enslaved persons of the French Caribbean, 'studying the goods they consumed and the patterns of their consumption...generates a different history'.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, this chapter recasts Bermudian and Turks Island colonists as consumers in the hopes of telling a different history. In this setting, Europe recedes into the background while colonial spaces and their interconnections take centre stage. This is not purely from an idealistic notion that these spaces have a history deserving representation, though that *is* meaningful. It is also because delving into the food chains that linked Britain's colonial possessions allows us to understand how the empire functioned as a whole. Without meeting the colonists' basic nutritional needs, a continuous flow of goods back to Europe would have been unviable. As it was, nutritional needs created inter-island food chains and sinew populations that were complex, co-dependent, and, at times, surprisingly resilient in the face of adversity. The salt-provisions trade of Bermuda and Turks Islands provides a fascinating example of one such inter-island food chain that helped tie the Atlantic world together.

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<sup>2</sup> John H Parry, 'American Independence: The View from the West Indies', *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Vol. 87 (1975), pp. 14-31.

<sup>3</sup> Bertie Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 63 (Spring, 2007), pp. 23.

This chapter will be divided into three parts: it will begin with a brief examination of the British Atlantic's provisioning regime prior to the American Revolution; it will move to address the food shortages wrought by the American Revolution; and it will finish with an in-depth discussion of the politics of provisions that emerged in Bermuda and Turks Islands at this time.

### **British mercantilism and the Atlantic food chain**

The British Empire was built on mercantilism, which dictated where its colonists could export their products to and from whom they could import. It was a closed and cohesive system that aimed to keep British trade, and theoretically its profits, circulating within the empire. No organisational structure epitomised mercantilism's incarnation more than the British Caribbean's sugar plantations. According to the Navigation Acts of 1660 and 1663, which provided the foundation for this formal economic structure, sugar produced in the colonies was for the exclusive importation of Britain and her colonies.<sup>4</sup>

However, to be successful and meet metropolitan demand, sugar's arduous and expensive production also required certain economies of scale, which increasingly put pressure on planters to make difficult pragmatic decisions on how to feed everyone. Though a successful sugar harvest offered tantalising yields, owning a plantation was high-risk and attended with spiralling costs. Given a viable alternative, many planters believed it did not pay to invest too much time and energy in the production of local, unprofitable provisions when land devoted to sugar had the potential to yield higher returns. Indeed, the pursuit of one tended to obfuscate the success of the other. In the end, the 'very emergence and continued existence' of the plantation system 'depended on several external factors', the most critical of which was an external food supply.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Russell R Menard, 'Plantation Empire: How Sugar and Tobacco Planters Built Their Industries and Raised an Empire', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 81 No. 3 (Summer, 2007), pp. 313-316.

<sup>5</sup> Selwyn H Carrington, 'The American Revolution and the British West Indies' Economy', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 17 No. 4 (Spring, 1987), p. 823.

From an early period the North American colonies became the ‘bread-baskets’ of the sugar islands.<sup>6</sup> In return for specie and Caribbean goods like sugar, molasses and rum, the continental colonies delivered much-needed Indian corn, rice, salted meat and fish to the British Caribbean. It cannot be overstated how important this relationship was to the growth and persistence of the plantation economy. Without it, the spread of cane fields would not have been feasible. As Eric Williams has reflected, ‘only the possession of the mainland colonies permitted this sugar monopoly of West Indian soil’.<sup>7</sup> But it was also a transformative process. In the development of plantation agriculture, these were ‘no longer the same islands’ environmentally or economically.<sup>8</sup> As populations increased and sugar monoculture predominated, these islands increasingly lost food sovereignty and were purposefully restructured to face outwards, in more ways than one. While these islands relied on British markets for the sale of sugar and their self-aggrandisement, they also became dependent on North American products to meet their nutritional needs.

While historians have enhanced our understanding of the provisioning regimes that criss-crossed the Atlantic world, further analysis within the context of saltpan economies is necessary.<sup>9</sup> Though the continental colonies sought

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 824.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Williams quoted in Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Hollsten, ‘Controlling Nature and Transforming Landscapes in the Early Modern Caribbean’, *Global Environment*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (2008), p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> For studies researching the Irish-Atlantic provisions trade, see Thomas M Truxes, *Irish-American Trade: 1660-1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); R C Nash, ‘Irish Atlantic Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 3 (Jul., 1985), pp. 329-356; and Mandelblatt, ‘A Transatlantic Commodity’. For studies focusing on the North American-British Caribbean provisions trade and the disruption the American Revolution wrought, see Carrington, ‘The American Revolution’; Jack P Greene, ‘Colonial South Carolina and the Caribbean Connection’, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 88 No. 4 (Oct., 1987), pp. 192-210; Parry, ‘American Independence’; Richard Sheridan, ‘The crisis of slave subsistence in the British West Indies during and after the American Revolution’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 33 No. 4 (Oct., 1976), pp. 615-61; and Michelle L Craig, ‘Grounds for Debate? The Place of the Caribbean Provisions Trade in Philadelphia’s Pre-revolutionary Economy’, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 128 No. 2 (Apr., 2004), pp. 149-177. For studies focusing on plantation provision grounds as a supplement to these inter-colonial provisioning regimes, see John H Parry, ‘Plantation and Provision Ground: An Historical Sketch of the Introduction of Food Crops into Jamaica’, *Revista de Historia de America*, No. 39 (Jun., 1955), pp. 1-20; and Justin Roberts, ‘Working between the Lines: Labor and Agriculture on Two Barbadian Sugar Plantations: 1796-97’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 63 No. 3 (Jul., 2006), pp. 551-586. For the effect of the slave diet upon

sugar, molasses and rum as high-status goods, salt was an essential item. Like sugar, it could not be produced on the continent in any significant quantity. Not only were the conditions inhospitable to its creation by solar evaporation, but also prior to the American Revolution continental colonists were actively discouraged from building salt-works in order to protect production in other parts of the empire.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, during their colonial period, ‘there was no substantial domestic salt-making in the Thirteen Colonies’ and they looked abroad to acquire the salt they needed.<sup>11</sup> Up and down the eastern seaboard, from the fishing industries of New England to the extensive cattle ranges of North Carolina, American colonists required vast quantities to preserve fish and meat for domestic consumption and overseas exportation. Material culture historians Dorothy Volo and James Volo have calculated the quantity of salt needed to preserve meat ‘was staggering, often equalling the weight of meat itself’.<sup>12</sup> North Carolina was particularly greedy, for in ‘no other colony was beef and pork as important in the economic life of the people’.<sup>13</sup> To meet these needs, they relied on Britain for the majority of their salt imports but not for all. In the shortfall, Turks Islands were some of the closest, most prolific salt-producing islands within reach of their shores. Prior to the American Revolution these islands were providing one fifth of North America’s total supply.<sup>14</sup> Bermudian salt traders and salt gatherers had, not accidentally, invested their efforts in a product that was indispensable to their continental neighbours.

Moreover, by the mid-eighteenth century, neither Bermuda nor Turks Islands were, or even could be, self-sufficient in food. Bermuda faced several challenges. For one, it was quickly recognised as overcrowded (see Chapter 3).

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the enslaved population, see Kenneth F Kiple and Virginia H Kiple, ‘Deficiency Diseases in the Caribbean’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 11 No. 2 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 197-215.

<sup>10</sup> R L Hilldrup, ‘The Salt Supply of North Carolina during the American Revolution’, *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 22 No. 4 (Oct., 1945), p. 396.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Adelberg, “‘Long in the Hand and altogether fruitless’: The Pennsylvania Salt Works and Salt Making on the New Jersey Shore during the American Revolution’, *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 80 No. 2 (Spring, 2013), p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Volo and James Volo quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Hilldrup, ‘The Salt Supply of North Carolina’, p. 393.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 397.

Moreover, after its maritime turn in the 1680s, Bermuda's economy shifted to embrace seafaring activities at the expense of agriculture, which was rebranded as low status and demeaning. Governor Richier commented in 1691 that 'none will labour ashore, either on land or in trades'.<sup>15</sup> Almost a century later, an anonymous reader of the *Bermuda Gazette* echoed this sentiment: 'the culture of land is a pursuit to which the Bermudians are generally averse'.<sup>16</sup> Yet because of Bermuda's population density, this turn to the sea was not foolish as it provided the means for islanders to purchase what they could not produce on the spot. With approximately 15,000 inhabitants and, at most, 12,000 acres, there was 'not so much as one acre per head for each inhabitant'.<sup>17</sup> This combination of agricultural neglect and overcrowding ensured Bermuda had to look abroad for provisions. To do so it needed something to trade: Turks Island salt.

More than Bermuda, Turks Islands were barren. Unlike the sugar islands that became gradually less fertile over time, these salt islands could not afford provisions from their first settlement. The hot, dry, saline conditions, so perfect for salt production, made it almost impossible to grow food. Time and again, local officials reported on the general agricultural impotence of the islands. In 1770, the Bahamas Governor reported: 'As to their Produce they yield not a single Commodity, except Salt, and in barrenness far exceed every other of the Bahamas, being not capable of supplying Vegetables of any kind for the necessary use of the People'.<sup>18</sup> Even obtaining water was a problem. The salt gatherers had to travel to the Eastern Caicos in order to obtain fresh water, 'the Water of these islands being so impregnated with Salt, that none, except the most indigent ever used it and those that do are obliged to mix it with so great a proportion of spirits, that they are seldom or ever cool' – perhaps accounting for why, by the afternoon, Turks Islanders were notorious for being 'always so intoxicated'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Governor Richier quoted in *Ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> The National Archives, A Bermudian to the Printer of the Bermuda Gazette, 10 April 1784, CO 37/39 ff. 154-157.

<sup>17</sup> The National Archives, William Brimage to the Secretary of State, 1780, CO 37/37 ff. 73-74. The National Archives, Governor Hamilton to the Secretary of State, 15 June 1790, CO 37/42/17.

<sup>18</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to the Secretary of State, 21 October 1770, CO 23/8 f. 137.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

The solution to provisioning Bermuda and Turks Islands lay in each other's strengths: Bermudian merchants had fast-sailing sloops that could carry Turks Island salt to market and return with provisions, while the salt gatherers, being 'the meanest rank of Bermudians', lacked the resources to carry on a merchant trade but could produce the item for trade itself.<sup>20</sup> From Turks Islands' first settlement, they and Bermuda were heavily, purposefully, co-dependent in this way. A Governor described how this relationship worked for Bermuda. In 1773, he reported, 'Our chief Trade is going to Turks Islands for Salt' and 'with the produce from the Salt, we buy and fetch all our corn, flour, salt pork, beef and lumber for mast and candles from North and South America'.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, a Bermudian who had spent time working at Turks Islands described how this relationship could work for the salt gatherers. He recalled that the salt gatherers were 'very frugal and Industrious' and lived 'chiefly on Indian Corn and Fish...which was sent them thither, from these Islands [Bermuda], by their Wives and Friends'.<sup>22</sup> A successful salt season tended to bring joy on both sides of this inter-island relationship as it signalled a period of mutual prosperity.

As a result of these supply chains for the sugar *and* the salt islands, an extensive provisions trade remained within Britain's imperial borders. It was cohesive, but fragile. As David Nally has pointed out, in times of strain, these people would have few safety nets to fall back on.<sup>23</sup> In the commodification of agribusiness, acute specialisation within different temperate and tropical zones instigated a displacement of people to colonies that could not support them on their own. As each island lost food sovereignty they became dependent on others, while mercantilism dictated that external relationships should be built on intra-imperial terms. When this economic system ran smoothly, it was relatively effective, but if external shocks disrupted the system's equilibrium, challenges arose. Climatic disasters like hurricanes could temporarily block trade routes and create episodic scarcity, but sustained periods of warfare and enduring geopolitical shifts could provoke famine. The American Revolution was one

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 6 November 1773, CO 37/36 f. 30.

<sup>22</sup> The National Archives, The Deposition of Benjamin Lightbourn, 5 August 1773, BT 6/74.

<sup>23</sup> David Nally, 'The biopolitics of food provisioning', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 36 No. 1 (Jan., 2011), pp. 41-44.



such external shock, a litmus test for the durability and flexibility of British mercantilism.

### **The impact of the American Revolution**

The impact of the American Revolution on Britain's sugar islands has been widely interpreted as a 'disaster', in which the groans of the plantations were loud and clear.<sup>24</sup> In 1774, the Continental Congress formed an association, which encouraged its supporters to follow a policy of non-importation from within the British Empire until the British Government revoked certain Acts it believed to be unjust. A policy of non-exportation to the same was added in September 1775. By the end of the year the British Government had responded, enacting an embargo on all commercial intercourse with its rebelling colonies.

These policies, on both sides, spelt enduring hardship for the Caribbean. With the declaration of war in 1776, food prices soared and imports were suddenly and drastically curtailed. As Richard Sheridan has demonstrated, a crisis of subsistence, particularly slave subsistence, emerged.<sup>25</sup> In 1777, the Council and Assembly of Barbados addressed the King,

We have, Sir, near 80,000 black and 12,000 white people daily to support. Our ground provisions (the internal resource) have failed for want of seasonable rains, the stock of provisions on hand will not last many weeks; and we are without hope of future foreign resources.<sup>26</sup>

By 1778, the mortality rate of enslaved persons from war-related famine was truly disturbing. Governor Burt of St Kitts estimated that,

From the best information I have been able to collect, the Island of Antigua has lost above a thousand Negroes, Montserrat near twelve hundred, and some Whites, Nevis three or four Hundred, and This Island as many from the Want of Provisions.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Parry, 'American Independence', pp. 14-31.

<sup>25</sup> Sheridan, 'The crisis of slave subsistence', pp. 615-641.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 620.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 625.

The British Government tried to compensate.<sup>28</sup> It legislated for Ireland to export its provisions directly to the British Caribbean in 1778. At the same time, it sought to increase the exportation of provisions from its own ports. However, it was an uncertain supply, as the convoy system had largely collapsed, and it did not provide enough to make up for the sudden, large shortfalls.<sup>29</sup> Reports of food shortage and famine continued. Even Jamaica, which benefited from a provision ground system and relative diversification of agriculture, was not immune. It experienced some of the highest mortality rates in the revolution's wake. Between 1780 and 1787, Jamaica lost around 15,000 lives to famine-related disease.<sup>30</sup> Prevalent hunger, culminating in starvation and death, was thus a widespread experience across the sugar islands of the British Caribbean. The American Revolution revealed the 'flaws' in each islands' 'environmental and social systems', which were unable to adapt to the geopolitical changes taking place around them.<sup>31</sup>

The salt islands, and those that relied on salt for trade, were also in danger. As an extremely small archipelago, Bermuda could not diversify into provision planting to meet its population's needs. Throughout the American Revolution the island did experience periods of shortage. On 14 June 1776, Governor Bruere reported, naively, that he hoped the Bahamas might be able to send a shipment of flour to them soon, 'otherwise the People here must starve'.<sup>32</sup> In October 1777, he was again writing to London cautioning that they were 'in great want of Provisions, either Indian corn to feed the Negroes or any substitute for Bread'.<sup>33</sup> Two years later, the Governor reiterated, 'We have been in the most deplorable Situation, for the want of provisions...not a tenth part sufficient hath arrived'.<sup>34</sup> Finally, in early 1780, Bermudians were 'all very nigh starving'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 618-619.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 620.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 632.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Bergman, 'Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *History Compass*, Vol. 6 No. 3 (May, 2008), p. 936.

<sup>32</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 14 June 1776, CO 37/36 f. 102.

<sup>33</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1777, CO 37/36 f. 161.

<sup>34</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 1 May 1779, CO 37/37 ff. 46-47.

<sup>35</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 6 April 1780, CO 37/37 ff. 77-84.

Given Turks Islands relied on Bermuda for their provisions, it is not surprising that by 1784 a local newspaper reported that ‘numbers of our [Bermudian] inhabitants...are starving at Turks Islands’.<sup>36</sup> In the wake of the American Revolution, these economically co-dependent islands had also suffered from want of food.

However, while these islands experienced hunger, and at times death, it was not on the scale endured by the sugar islands. This was despite the fact Bermuda and Turks Islands were arguably as vulnerable, if not more so. Economically, they were heavily co-dependent and separated by the Sargasso Sea that became infested with privateers and naval ships as the war progressed. Environmentally, both were some of the smallest and most barren islands of the Caribbean. Their inability to produce food, particularly at Turks Islands, was verging on agricultural impotence, while their reliance on North American markets for provisions was at least as strong as the rest of the Caribbean. Yet though they experienced food scarcity, their colonial populations did not sustain the soaring mortality rates recorded elsewhere. The American Revolution was disruptive, but it was not a disaster.

#### *An enduring salt-provisions trade*

This was primarily because, unlike the sugar islands, the salt islands were able to manipulate their ‘economic and social systems’ and dynamically adjust to the shifting geopolitical realities around them.<sup>37</sup> The salt-provisions trade that had been the lifeline of Bermuda and Turks Islands before the revolution largely endured. When war was declared, imperial decrees should have shut this trade down or seen it drastically curtailed. This was, generally, not the case.

This is evident in a series of letters from the Bermuda Governor in this period. In October 1776, Governor Bruere wrote to Captain Jordan of the *Galatea* begging for his ship of war to remain on the station. The Governor despaired of ‘the Temper of the Inhabitants in respect to this Rebellion, and the many fine lies they make under the supposed apprehensions of Starving’ while

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<sup>36</sup> The National Archives, A Bermudian to the Printer of the Bermuda Gazette, 10 April 1784, CO 37/39 ff. 154-157.

<sup>37</sup> Bergman, ‘Disaster’, p. 936.

they carry on ‘a large illicit trade with Salt, to the enemies of Great Britain’.<sup>38</sup> A year later, in April, Governor Bruere reported that the British navy had taken several Bermudian vessels, ‘as they stole a trade without entering or clearing their Vessels, with Salt to North America, In exchange for corn etc’.<sup>39</sup> Time and again, the sheer quantity of salt worried the Governor. In March 1778, he pointedly compared the quantity of smuggled salt with that of molasses and rum, deeming the latter of pitiful consequence:

I conceive that large Quantities of Salt, cleared out, from Turks Islands, and carried directly from thence to the Rebels, and some Salt brought from Turks Islands here, and then by Stealth, carried off again, hath been of much more Detriment to His Majesty’s Service, than any small Quantities of Rum or Molasses, could be Detrimental to the King’s Service or the contractors.<sup>40</sup>

In this passage, the British Government’s stance against granting licences for molasses and rum was altogether missing the mark in Bermuda. When the governorship devolved onto the late Governor’s son in October 1780, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere found it ‘in the most alarming situation, not only for the Enemy without, but from the disaffection of many of the Inhabitants of Great Britain, manifested by...an almost general Trade and Intercourse with the Enemy affording immense and essential supplies of Salt’.<sup>41</sup> He wrote to London specifically asking for official instructions and ‘some check likewise to Turks Islands’ to deal with a salt trade that had become so ubiquitous ‘a week scarce passes but Vessels return from the Rebels’.<sup>42</sup>

When the Paris Treaty was signed between Britain and the new United States on 3 September 1783, the rules governing British trade with the Americans had to be agreed. For this, the British Government gave full authority

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<sup>38</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to Captain Jordan, 12 October 1776, CO 37/39 ff. 67-68.

<sup>39</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 19 April 1777, CO 37/36 f. 149.

<sup>40</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 19 March 1778, CO 37/37 ff. 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> The National Archives, The Memorial of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere against Governor Brown, 10 June 1784, CO 37/39 ff. 61-66.

<sup>42</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 8 February 1781, CO 37/38 ff. 40-41. The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 26 March 1781, CO 37/38 f. 42.

to the Crown to regulate the empire's American commerce through Orders in Council.<sup>43</sup> This authority was meant to last six months; in practice, successive enabling Acts and Orders in Council continued until 1788. In that year, the British Government enacted legislation to formalise the empire's developing trade relationship with the United States, but the original Order in Council largely provided the basis of this statute. Proclaimed in 1783, it decreed that Britain and her colonies could import American lumber, flour, bread, grain, vegetables and livestock and export to the United States rum, sugar, molasses, coffee, nuts, ginger and pimento. The importation of American meat, dairy produce and fish was prohibited and the trade was ordered to be in British vessels manned with British sailors. Though it was not without fierce contention, those in power believed this arrangement was consistent with British mercantilism and would support a growing British navy.

At the time, it was hoped the newly settled colonies in Canada and Nova Scotia would step in to provide the provisions so desperately needed in the British Caribbean. In March 1784, Lieutenant Durnford was sent to survey Bermuda in his capacity as an engineer and was patently optimistic. He cheerfully stated that the new Loyalist settlers in Nova Scotia 'will soon be able to raise provisions for exportation and furnish lumber for the supply of the West India Islands'.<sup>44</sup> However, like others, he worried about the time it might take for these new settlements to begin an export trade. Unless Nova Scotia and Canada could export quickly, he feared it would be difficult 'to break off that habitual connexion which has hitherto subsisted between the American States and the West India Islands'.<sup>45</sup> He advised the British Government to do all it could to offer encouragement to the trade. But his fears proved well founded as Bermuda and Turks Islands' reliance on American provisions continued.

After the war, the Crown's prohibition on American vessels carrying British goods was at times circumvented at Turks Islands. In October 1784, the Bahamian Collector warned his Governor that it was 'not in his power to prevent

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<sup>43</sup> Herbert C Bell, 'British Commercial Policy in the West Indies, 1783-93', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 31 No. 123 (Jul., 1916), pp. 435-436 and p. 441.

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant Andrew Durnford's remarks on the Islands of Bermuda to the Under-Secretary of State, 21 March 1784, CO 37/38 ff. 355-356.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

foreign vessels from resorting to the out islands'.<sup>46</sup> Five months later, the Governor wrote to London warning of his inability to check the Out Islands' illicit trade, stating that 'the quantity of salt raked upon these Islands is considerable' but 'unless a small Naval force is allowed to protect it, it will be impossible to prevent American interlopers'.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, in Bermuda, Governor Brown reported in 1785 of 'the great success the Bermudians employed at Turks Islands have had this season raking salt and the high price it has demanded'.<sup>48</sup> But he conceded, 'from want of authority to restrain it, greater quantities of salt are carried from thence in American vessels than seems consistent with His Majesty's Order'.<sup>49</sup> Finally, an Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda in 1787 confirmed that while Bermudians were the only persons engaged in *raking* salt, it appeared some American vessels had 'continued to lade salt there'.<sup>50</sup> This, they verily believed, could be stopped if the British Government decreed against it, but there was no denying an illegal and direct American trade was at times entertained.<sup>51</sup>

However, in truth, the proportion of Bermudian vessels calling at Turks Islands for a salt-run dramatically increased. As Collector Duncan Stewart reported in 1787, 'Before the changes in the Government of America, there were four Americans to One British; since that Period the Americans still come, but by no means in so great Numbers; the greatest Part is now carried off in Bermudian vessels'.<sup>52</sup> Bermudian merchants now took the largest market share, but their currency was – as it always had been – in American provisions. The Collector's

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<sup>46</sup> The National Archives, Collector Robert Hunt to Governor Maxwell, 14 October 1784, CO 23/25/234.

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives, Governor Powell to the Secretary of State, 19 March 1785, CO 23/25/312.

<sup>48</sup> The National Archives, Governor Brown to the Secretary of State, 30 September 1785, CO 37/40 ff. 18-19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> The National Archives, Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda on the Rights of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects at the Turks and Caicos Islands to the Secretary of State, 12 May 1787, CO 37/40 f. 285.

<sup>51</sup> This direct American trade would become legal in 1788 when an Act of Parliament for regulating the trade between Britain's colonies and the United States included a specific clause that granted permission 'to the subjects of the United States to load Salt on the Turks Islands upon payment of certain Duties'. See The National Archives, Secretary of State to (acting) King's Agent Zachariah Hood, 3 June 1788, CO 24/14 ff. 125-126.

<sup>52</sup> The National Archives, Collector Duncan Stewart to Board of Trade, 29 November 1787, CO 37/23 f. 37.

report elaborates. When questioned as to what the Americans and Bermudians brought to Turks Islands in exchange for salt, Stewart commented that the Americans ‘brought some provisions, but chiefly Cash’, while the Bermudians had ‘some Cash, but chiefly paid for it in Provisions and Dry Goods’.<sup>53</sup> This pattern was also captured in the above-mentioned Address. It stated that ‘as the persons who resort annually to the Turks Islands are in General poor and unable to furnish themselves at the Time of their leaving Bermuda with provisions’, they instead ‘depend on purchasing occasionally’ and ‘it becomes habitual and necessary for every vessel going in Quest of Salt to carry some supply of Provisions and Clothing to barter’.<sup>54</sup>

An examination of cargo lists confirms this. On 7 July 1788, the sloop *Queen Charlotte* cleared out of Bermuda for Turks Islands carrying a cargo of twenty barrels of Indian meal, six barrels of bread, six barrels of peas, two barrels of flour, twenty bushels of Indian corn as well as a selection of dry goods including two casks of nails, specifically stating ‘all which Goods are for the use of the People employed in raking Salt at Turks Islands’.<sup>55</sup> In the same month, the brigantine *Commerce* cleared out of Bermuda with ‘100 bushels Corn for the use of People employed gathering Salt at Turks Islands’.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the *Little Ruth* cleared out with ‘300 Bushels Corn for the use of the People at Turks Islands’.<sup>57</sup> By the late 1780s, the salt-provisions trade between the United States, Bermuda and Turks Islands had endured.

In the aftermath of revolution, Bermudian merchants were the chief conduits through which salt gatherers obtained their food; food these merchants continued to source from the United States. By 1788, the optimism Durnford had originally felt was gone. From Bermuda he wrote to London with a renewed sense of pessimism: ‘The Custom House Laws and Regulations are become a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> The National Archives, Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda on the Rights of His Majesty’s Bermuda Subjects at the Turks and Caicos Islands to the Secretary of State, 12 May 1787, CO 37/40 f. 285.

<sup>55</sup> The National Archives, Quarterly Returns inwards and outwards of the Naval Office of Bermuda commencing 1 July 1788 to 31 December 1788 in Governor Hamilton’s despatch to the Secretary of State, 11 March 1789, CO 37/23 f. 132.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

mere Farce and every man carries on such trade as he thinks proper'.<sup>58</sup> Save the erection of lighthouses or the foundation of Bermuda as a station of war, he firmly believed 'there is nothing...to prevent the Connexion of the Inhabitants of these islands with those of America'.<sup>59</sup>

### **The politics of provisions**

If a flourishing salt-provisions trade gave Bermuda and Turks Islands better access to food during this turbulent time, it is important to understand why they had more adaptable and dynamic socioeconomic systems. For this, it is necessary to delve into the politics of provisions the revolution galvanised. Examined here in the context of an illicit salt-provisions trade, a politics of provisions was activated that stemmed from four significant factors: the customary tradition of smuggling in Bermuda and Turks Islands; the weakness of the Bermuda and the Bahamas' executive function; the inordinate strength of Bermuda's legislative branch and its stance towards the salt-provisions trade; and the American need for salt.

#### *'A familiar culture of illegality'*

As the American Revolution began, Turks Islands and Bermuda greeted it with a customary tradition of smuggling. In his study of mid-eighteenth century contraband practices in Florida and the Bahamas, Alan Karras describes these colonies as 'frontier posts' and argues that 'as a result of their peripheral position within the imperial field of vision, imperial representatives in such places had significant leeway to negotiate and compromise'.<sup>60</sup> In such colonial zones, particularly in infant colonies, those in power often tolerated contraband practices because they understood it would bolster the islands' economy and encourage further settlement in what were otherwise unappealing places.

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<sup>58</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant Andrew Durnford to the Under-Secretary of State, 8 October 1788, CO 37/40 ff. 308-311.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Alan Karras, "'Custom Has the Force of Law": Local officials and contraband in the Bahamas and Florida, 1748-1779', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 80 No. 3 (Winter, 2002), p. 281 and pp. 281-282.



‘Playing by the rules’, and libelling vessels for violating laws of trade, was infrequently endorsed and normally only in exemplary fashion.<sup>61</sup> This process allowed a ‘familiar culture of illegality’ to flourish that would prove difficult to dislodge in times of war, even when ministerial scrutiny became more watchful.<sup>62</sup> This was apt for Bermuda and Turks Islands.

As Karras has shown, from 1766, the first King’s Agent openly encouraged foreign traders to land all kinds of merchandise at Turks Islands and effectively created a *de facto*, but completely illegal, free port.<sup>63</sup> Andrew Symmer did this unabashedly, sending reports of incoming and outgoing cargoes to the Board of Trade, while he made his case to the British Government that Turks Islands should become a legal free port. In Symmer’s view, an infant colony with little to recommend it (apart from salt) needed the encouragement of a contraband trade to promote individual capital accumulation. Ideally, he wished this arrangement to be formalised, but in the meantime, as a fledgling colony, he believed his actions did not violate the spirit of the Navigation Acts in so far as they brought Turks Islands further into the empire’s orbit. While this trade persisted unencumbered for several years, in 1770 it earned the condemnation of the Bahamas Governor who manoeuvred to ‘consolidate his own position by favouring his London superiors over local residents’.<sup>64</sup> In effect, Governor Shirley decided that the long-term benefits of allowing a clandestine trade at the extremities of his jurisdiction no longer exceeded its short-term costs. He highlighted Symmer’s abuses to the British Government and the Navigation Acts forced its hand. Restrictions were tightened and Symmer reminded that he was not an independent official but a subordinate to the Bahamas Governor. In 1776, the Governor formally decreed that only salt could be exported directly from Turks Islands and only provisions could be imported directly within. This was perhaps an inevitable outcome, but by then a smuggling trade was engrained and, if no longer openly supported, it was tacitly overlooked.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp. 282-283.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 283.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp. 292-295.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 294.

Likewise Bermuda had a colourful history of contraband prior to the American Revolution, not least because its geography was so favourable. Upon Governor Bruere's arrival to Bermuda in 1765, he wrote:

I have acquainted your Lordships, in several letters, the dispersed and scattered situation I found the Trade in, at my arrival. Every Person conducting their Vessels to their Own Doors, to the several Creeks and Harbours, all round these Islands under the Countenance of an Instruction, that Governor William Popple obtained: that vessels might load and unload at the West End provided it was under the Inspection and Presence of a Searcher, who I found has been dead some years and no one appointed in his Room.<sup>65</sup>

Governor Bruere tried to curb these evasive manoeuvres by ordering all vessels to enter and clear at the island's port of entry, St George's. However, he could not prevent the vessels from sailing 'again to the several different harbours, before they take their Departure' where, he presumed, illegal cargoes were loaded.<sup>66</sup> By 1772, an absence of soldiers ensured more brazen activities were taking place. To illustrate, Governor Bruere shared a case involving several inhabitants that forcibly removed a Bermudian sloop from a Customs House officer. The sloop had been charged with a breach of the Navigation Acts, but after being held for one night, its captain, owner, and several others 'took some Negroes with them on board, and overpowered and forced the Custom House Officer, and the few men with him, off the Vessel, and ran away with the Sloop to Sea'.<sup>67</sup> Without troops, Governor Bruere could do little to prevent such occurrences and made an ominous, rather prophetic, prediction: that in the future Bermuda 'may be liable to Insult even from the Gang of Privateers Men, in time of War, or even in the Smuggling business [as] the Custom House Officers find it very difficult to get the least Assistance'.<sup>68</sup> The people's rebellious spirit seemed engrained: 'From the time of Mr Pitt, being Governor of Bermuda and

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<sup>65</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, May 1765, CO 37/39 ff. 160-161.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 5 December 1772, CO 37/36 f. 8.

<sup>68</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 6 November 1773, CO 37/36 f. 30.

during both the Mr Popples Governments, it doth appear that these People, have been very obstinate, untoward and Refractory'.<sup>69</sup>

*A weak executive function*

At the same time, the weak position of Bermuda's Governors during and after the revolution seriously affected the executive's ability to enact imperial directives. Though Governor Bruere encouraged local inhabitants to fit out privateers, without a strong military or naval presence many lacked incentive. Governor Bruere reflected in January 1775 that when the 'scandalous' practices of the Bermudians were considered, 'such irregularities cannot be prevented...[T]here are no Soldiers here, the appearance of whom might deter them from such wicked or malpractice or a sloop of war to be either stationed or to look into Bermuda sometimes'.<sup>70</sup> By July, he believed 'there may be but few friends to government here' and following the notorious gunpowder robbery on 14 August 1775 he fully despaired of 'the miserable Situation I am in, without any assistance'.<sup>71</sup> So desperate was he for military support, he tried to persuade the Secretary of State to send over two companies that 'might be formed principally from Chelsea Hospital, and the Out Pensioners, and this Moderate Climate, might give longevity to some of the Old Men, who do not march about here'.<sup>72</sup> He also mused that the islands would make a good place for 'the Sick and wounded of the army', all in an attempt to put boots on the ground.<sup>73</sup>

Undoubtedly, this poor state of defence was not always the case during the war. At times Bermuda did welcome one or two ships of war. In April 1777, Governor Bruere reported the arrival of His Majesty's *Galatea* and *Nautilus*, which were a boon to the island and his government's security. The Governor reported favourably that 'these two...have prevented since their Arrival, the

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<sup>69</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 16 September 1777, CO 37/36 f. 159.

<sup>70</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 24 January 1775, CO 37/36 f. 57.

<sup>71</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 31 July 1775, CO 37/36 f. 68. The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 20 August 1775, CO 37/36 f. 74.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

coast of Bermuda from being infested with rebel privateers and myself carried off'.<sup>74</sup> However, the ships of war never stayed long, needing to both restock with provisions and follow Admiralty Orders. By October, both ships had left, leaving Governor Bruere once again dejected.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, France's entry into the war in 1778 meant few of His Majesty's ships of war would thereon be spared to visit Bermuda. To compensate, Sir Henry Clinton did send two companies of invalid soldiers to the colony. However, 'pro-American Bermudians worked out effective ways to evade shoreside military patrols' while the soldiers themselves tended to focus their efforts on refortifying the East End, leaving the West End open to illicit trade.<sup>76</sup> Thus although Bermuda gained troops that may have deterred an enemy invasion, many were 'without legs, arms or constitutions' and could not offer the Governor the support that regular ships of war might have done in the fight against contraband trade.<sup>77</sup>

Moreover, tackling the salt-provisions trade required a multifaceted, collaborative approach to address all points of the commodity chain. Upon his arrival in October 1780, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere immediately set about contacting governors and military and naval officers in different spheres, believing that only 'by a Cooperation against these Rebell Traders in all parts of His Majesty's Possessions an End would be nearly put to the Bermudian Malpractices'.<sup>78</sup> However, achieving this in wartime when resources were overstretched was difficult. If the Bermuda Governor struggled to implement imperial orders, he was not alone. In 1779, the Bahamas Governor similarly wrote to the Secretary of State despairing, 'what opposition can I make when I have neither Great guns, nor small arms...neither ammunition nor Man of War of any kind on this Station'?<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, at Turks Islands, the King's Agent reported that upon his return to the islands after an attack in 1778, he 'found the inhabitants had entered into a secret agreement with...the French Governor of St

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<sup>74</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 19 April 1777, CO 37/36 f. 149.

<sup>75</sup> The National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 24 October 1777, CO 37/36 f. 162.

<sup>76</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p. 419.

<sup>77</sup> The Patriot Press quoted in Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 7 January 1781, CO 37/38 ff. 35-37.

<sup>79</sup> The National Archives, Governor Browne to the Secretary of State, 29 June 1779, CO 23/24/191.

Domingo’.<sup>80</sup> He tried administering the oath of allegiance but ‘afterwards finding I had no assistance to support me but from a few Loyal Subjects, they [the inhabitants] altered their Conduct, acted in the most Rebellious manner and set Government at Defiance’.<sup>81</sup> Symmer felt compelled to leave the islands once more ‘to the Mercy of a lawless Banditti’.<sup>82</sup> He returned to New Providence, accepted a position as Judge of the Admiralty, and for a time Turks Islands were without an imperial officer – effectively beyond the pale of both the Bahamas and Bermuda Governors.

*An American-friendly Bermudian legislature*

Restricting the salt-provisions trade would have been easier had there been a more compliant Bermudian legislature with a less sympathetic stance towards the salt-provisions trade. Its tentacles of influence permeated most sectors of government administration and, through family connections, the wider populace. Without its support, the Governor was an isolated figure. Its stance towards the illicit trade was unsurprising considering many members of the Council and Assembly were leading merchants of the islands. Both Governor Bruere and Lieutenant-Governor Bruere regularly reported the problems elicited by this fact, and the disharmony to government it could bring. In July 1777, Governor Bruere reported that the Assembly ‘could not help throwing some dirt or dispraise’ on the visiting ships of war, ‘as they have lost several of their vessels and cargoes taken by the *Galatea* and *Nautilus*’; while in June 1784, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere complained that the recent seizure of vessels ‘employed in carrying Salt etc to the Colonies in rebellion,...belong[ed] to some of the leading Members of the Assembly,...[and had] stirred up the malice of a most wicked, powerful and dangerous faction’.<sup>83</sup> This faction was built through strong familial and social ties that linked the Council and Assembly together.

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<sup>80</sup> The National Archives, King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State, 13 December 1779, CO 23/10 f. 86.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> National Archives, Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 14 July 1777, CO 37/36 f. 155. The National Archives, The Memorial of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere against Governor Brown, 10 June 1784, CO 37/39 ff. 61-66.

In a remarkable list produced by Lieutenant-Governor Bruere, he unpacked these connections for his superiors in London.<sup>84</sup> The web of associations bridging both legislative branches is apparent, with the Tucker family forming a common denominator. Of the Council, the following was recorded: ‘President Thomas Jones: suspended by the Lieutenant Governor ... – married to Chief Justice Harvey’s sister, related to the Tuckers’; ‘John Harvey – Related and connected with the Tuckers, suspended by the Lieutenant Governor’; ‘Henry Tucker – Son of the Agent’; ‘John Tudor – nearly related and closely connected with the Tuckers’; ‘Francis Forbes – Nephew to the President’; and ‘Collector Traill – Complained against by the Lt Governor’.<sup>85</sup> There were just four persons that the Lieutenant Governor deemed unconnected with the Tucker family, three of whom were abroad. A similar picture was painted for the Assembly, which included members of the Tucker family who were also officers of the island’s militia and justices of the peace, while ‘George Bascome – the only lawyer in the island (except the Attorney General) [was] married to the niece of Henry Tucker, Agent’.<sup>86</sup> This Colonial Agent, who resided in London, was also recorded as fathering two sons in the American army, one of whom was St George Tucker.

St George Tucker’s biography is an example of the socioeconomic ties that bound Bermuda with the American colonies.<sup>87</sup> He relocated to Virginia from Bermuda in 1772 at a time when the Tuckers were politically powerful but financially overstretched. Upon arrival, he quickly rose through the ranks of Virginian society and in 1778 he married a well-connected American widow who brought to their marriage three large plantations, ‘immediately making Tucker a substantial member of the state’s planter elite’.<sup>88</sup> While enjoying his new sociability, he ‘risked everything in the American Revolution’ by maintaining his

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<sup>84</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State with a list of the island’s council members, agent, leading assembly members and commission appointed to take depositions, c. 1781-1784, CO 37/39 ff. 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Phillip Hamilton, ‘Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery’s Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household of Early National Virginia’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 55 No. 4 (Oct., 1998), p. 533.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Bermudian connections.<sup>89</sup> With ‘his Bermudian kin’, he ‘participated in a smuggling operation in the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean transporting desperately needed goods’ that linked these zones together.<sup>90</sup> Undoubtedly, then, the Tuckers were a known and powerful Bermudian-American family with significant political clout and trading interests in both places. Their ability to form alliances within the Council and Assembly, cover their clandestine trade, and simultaneously reassure London of their loyalty, ensured that governing officials who opposed their interests risked political isolation.

Such a legislature deployed various tactics to protect the salt-provisions trade. In September 1778, several leading members of both houses with a ‘great number of the inhabitants’ formed ‘a wicked association’ ‘against buying, dealing or having intercourse with the owners or agents of privateers and resolved that all People offending against such Association should be considered as Enemies of this Country’.<sup>91</sup> This association tasked its clerk, George Bascome, with ‘prosecut[ing] the owners of privateers for capturing any Bermudian vessels coming home or going to the colonies in Rebellion’.<sup>92</sup> ‘So violent’ was this association that privateer Pendock Neale was ‘obliged to take armed men on shore with him to protect his person’, while on two occasions privateer Bridger Goodrich had to give up the vessels he had captured altogether ‘on account of the tumultuous rising of the people’.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the association tapped into intelligence networks that linked Bermuda with Turks Islands. The case of William Honey is illustrative. Honey was a Bermudian master and part owner of a sloop called *Three Friends*. In February 1776, his vessel was contracted by HMS *Diligence* to act as a tender and to cruise off Turks Islands ‘to prevent Vessels from taking Salt’.<sup>94</sup> Honey succeeded in capturing the sloop *Dick Cole*, mastered by a Bermudian, that had recently gone to South Carolina,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives, The Declaration of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere, 1 August 1783, CO 37/39 f. 171. The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 7 January 1781, CO 37/38 ff. 35-37. The National Archives, The Deposition of Pendock Neale to Interrogatories on behalf of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere, 10 March 1784, CO 37/27 f. 137.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. The National Archives, The Deposition of Bridger Goodrich to Interrogatories on behalf of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere, 19 August 1783, CO 37/39 f. 181.

<sup>94</sup> The National Archives, The Deposition of William Honey, 5 April 1781, CO 37/39 ff. 10-11.

Curaçao and was finally at Turks Islands ‘for a load of Salt’.<sup>95</sup> He escorted the *Dick Cole* to Jamaica as a prize where it was condemned. The following year Honey returned to Bermuda. A few days after his arrival, at two o’clock in the morning, a neighbour woke up to discover *Three Friends* was on fire and notified Honey. Though the fire was put out, ‘a quantity of combustibles’ was found in the binnacle, persuading Honey that it ‘was set on Fire by some Malicious person or persons with an intent to destroy her’.<sup>96</sup> Subsequently, he was ‘advertised by anonymous papers put up in the most public places in a very opprobrious and reproachful manner’ while lawsuits ‘commenced against him for a supposed conversion of four Negro Men captured on board the sloop Dick-Cole’.<sup>97</sup> He believed George Bascome was behind these actions ‘with an intent to detain him on the island’.<sup>98</sup> Having pursued Honey’s actions from Turks Islands to Bermuda, the association arrested his career as a privateer for two years.

Leading Council and Assembly members were also adept at ensuring their power was not diluted. Upon his inauguration, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere initiated an ambitious plan to reorganise his Council. With assent from London, he made new appointments across the Council, including Robert Traill as Collector. Unsurprisingly, given his family’s trading concerns, a new Collector piqued Colonial Agent Henry Tucker’s interest. In London, he made a point of seeking out the new Collector’s son to gauge the father’s character. He reported wryly that after a conversation with the young Traill he found he ‘is truly on the other side’ of Lieutenant-Governor Bruere’s ‘party’ and that he would try ‘to persuade his father that it was his interest to join the People...and he was sure he would do it’.<sup>99</sup> Though Lieutenant-Governor Bruere had high expectations for Collector Traill, his optimism proved premature. Having intercepted the Colonial Agent’s letters, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere castigated his schemes ‘to set at variance the Governor, Lt Governor, military and Crown Officers’.<sup>100</sup> But by December 1781 the Lieutenant Governor was ‘sorry to inform your Lordship

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> The National Archives, Henry Tucker Senior to Henry Tucker Junior, 30 September 1780, CO 37/38 f. 91.

<sup>100</sup> The National Archives, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere to the Secretary of State, 14 December 1781, CO 37/38 ff. 99-100.



they have partly succeeded with the Custom House and the Attorney General'.<sup>101</sup> He urged the British Government 'to watch the Custom House and Inhabitants as the latter will do everything to bring the former to their faction'.<sup>102</sup> In the early 1780s, Collector Traill wrote salutary remarks to London reassuring ministers that the Bermudians were 'no friends to the Americans' while making emoluments off the sale of British registers in the American trade.<sup>103</sup> He was suspended from office in 1785 for embezzlement of tax funds.<sup>104</sup>

For those who *did* try to enact imperial directives, their days in office could be numbered.<sup>105</sup> In October 1781, Lieutenant-Governor Bruere appointed Paul Bascome Searcher of the West End of Bermuda. Bascome kept this post until February 1783, during which time he 'seized several vessels and carried their tryals through the Court of Admiralty', using part of his prize money to fit out a vessel with armed men.<sup>106</sup> Bascome's diligence proved his downfall. When Governor Brown took over from Lieutenant-Governor Bruere in 1782, leading members of the Assembly wasted no time advising him to suspend Bascome. They complained of 'the seizures made by him uniformly wear the mark of a design to vex and harass the Trade of these islands, or of personal spleen or Malice'.<sup>107</sup> Governor Brown acquiesced to their request. Bascome was suspended, without a reason or a hearing. Letters to the Secretary of State reveal the want of evidence. Governor Brown admitted, 'I have no proof of the reality of the accusations brought against him'.<sup>108</sup> His only object was to maintain a harmonious connection with the Assembly; 'to consult what is prudent to the exclusion of what is just'.<sup>109</sup> Thus through the use of persuasion, manipulation

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> The National Archives, Collector Robert Traill to the Secretary of State, 4 January 1783, CO 37/38 ff. 162-165.

<sup>104</sup> The National Archives, Governor Brown to the Secretary of State, 16 December 1785, CO 37/40 ff. 20-23.

<sup>105</sup> Karas, 'Local Officials and Contraband', p. 287.

<sup>106</sup> The National Archives, Paul Bascome to the Under-Secretary of State, 3 June 1789, CO 37/42/43.

<sup>107</sup> The National Archives, An Address of the General Assembly of Bermuda to Governor Brown, 12 February 1783, CO 37/39 ff. 53-54.

<sup>108</sup> The National Archives, Governor Brown to the Secretary of State, 30 April 1783, CO 37/38 ff. 274-275.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

and intimidation, the legislative branch ensured the executive had neither the civil support nor the resources to clamp down on the salt-provisions trade.

### *An American need for salt*

The most important encouragement to Bermuda and Turks Islands' salt-provisions trade, however, came from the needs of the rebellious colonies. Unlike sugar, molasses and rum, salt was *essential* within their food economy. Since previously it could be imported relatively cheaply, domestic production within the thirteen colonies was almost entirely absent prior to the outbreak of war.<sup>110</sup> When the Continental Congress implemented its policy of non-importation from the British Empire on 1 December 1774, the onset of salt famine was rapid and widespread. By 1775, many patriots feared that unless alternatives were found, the boycott would likely fail.<sup>111</sup> As panic set in, ordinary citizens hoarded salt, facilitating further price rises. In Virginia, before the war, a bushel of salt cost approximately two shillings.<sup>112</sup> By 1776, it cost thirteen. In a letter from the provincial council of North Carolina to the Continental Congress, the desperation was palatable: 'It is impossible for us to describe the distressed situation of this state for the want of salt, the inhabitants in general say only let them have that article and they will fight'.<sup>113</sup> Salt shortages like this were prevalent across all southern colonies.

The Continental Congress understood the risk. In July 1775, it called on a committee 'to inquire into the cheapest and easiest methods of making salt in the colonies'.<sup>114</sup> By the end of the year, it advised each colony to 'immediately promote by sufficient public encouragement, the making of salt'.<sup>115</sup> Pamphlets describing how to make salt proliferated and William Brownrigg's *The Art of Making Common Salt* resurfaced on this side of the Atlantic.<sup>116</sup> In October 1776,

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<sup>110</sup> Larry G Bowman, 'The Scarcity of Salt in Virginia during the American Revolution', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 77 No. 4 (Oct., 1969), p. 464.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 465.

<sup>113</sup> Hilldrup, 'The Salt Supply of North Carolina', p. 411.

<sup>114</sup> Minutes of the continental congress quoted in Adelberg, 'The Pennsylvania Salt Works', p. 216.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of the Continental Congress quoted in Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p. 398.

Samuel Ashe wrote from Cape Fear to the provincial council of North Carolina that ‘the Humour of Salt boiling seems to be taking place here...every Old Wife is now scouring her pint pot for the necessary operation’.<sup>117</sup> Yet these cottage industries could not tackle a national shortage. Taking their direction from the Continental Congress, several provincial governments began a series of state-sponsored salt works, which attracted large government investments. In Philadelphia, the provincial government invested in a local merchant to erect the state-sponsored Pennsylvanian Salt Works on the New Jersey shore.<sup>118</sup> However, for various reasons, this attempt was a failure. After three years of production, the Pennsylvanian Salt Works was sold and its government funding ended.<sup>119</sup> In that time, only twenty bushels of salt had been produced on its premises, one-thirtieth of what had originally been promised in a year.<sup>120</sup>

Importing foreign salt was the only viable option. In hindsight, the Continental Congress regretted its blanket ban on the importation of British goods. By late 1775, it had amended its stance. On 29 December, the Continental Congress permitted the provincial councils of Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland to export agricultural commodities to friendly ports abroad in return for salt, in order to relieve those ‘now suffering great distress from want of that necessary article’.<sup>121</sup> Virginia’s General Assembly moved to grant licences that permitted any merchant entering the colony with salt to legally export Virginian tobacco, corn and other agricultural goods.<sup>122</sup> Simultaneously, the provincial government embarked on a project of state importation, acquiring a fleet of vessels to traverse the Atlantic in search of this commodity.<sup>123</sup> Though salt was acquired from several different places, ‘it was upon Bermuda which Virginia relied heavily to supply her needs’, primarily trading it for corn.<sup>124</sup> North Carolina also used Bermuda as its main conduit for salt, trading it for rice.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Samuel Ashe quoted in Hilldrup, ‘The Salt Supply of North Carolina’, p. 408.

<sup>118</sup> Adelberg, ‘The Pennsylvania Salt Works’.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>121</sup> Hilldrup, ‘The Salt Supply of North Carolina’, p. 410.

<sup>122</sup> Bowman, ‘The Scarcity of Salt in Virginia’, p. 469.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Hilldrup, ‘The Salt Supply of North Carolina’, p. 416.

These salt-provision networks between Bermuda and the North American colonies ensured the former acquired food while the latter could preserve it.

The implication of this for the revolution was significant. In a secret despatch from Lord North to General Howe on 28 October 1777, Lord North expressed the British Government's pressing concern for how George Washington's army was being supplied with, amongst other items, salt. Focusing his attention on European exports, but also relevant for Bermuda and Turks Islands, he reported,

News has been received at Paris of the great distress of the Rebels for want of European commodities (particularly Cloaths & Salt) and it is believed by many people there, that the Rebellion is over unless a large and speedy supply is sent immediately to America.<sup>126</sup>

With this in mind, Lord North prevailed on General Howe to do all he could to intercept vessels that were carrying these commodities to the rebels. In Bermuda, government officials similarly warned the harmful effects this trade had on Britain's war effort. In 1780, William Brimage argued,

The Southern Colonies must have returned from Revolt, had they not been in a great measure supplied with the Grand Article of Salt and many other necessities by these people, [that] from such conduct are exempted in all Congress Marine Commissions.<sup>127</sup>

So basic and critical was salt to the morale and strength of the American war effort, he urged, 'I wish permission to say that were the Salt Islands locked up, as also this [island], am of Opinion the Southern Colonies would subdue themselves'.<sup>128</sup> Without salt, many American leaders feared the physical energy of the Continental Army would drain while its morale was sapped, as food availability for mobile forces inevitably declined. Such bleak prospects were a powerful motivator, and pressed the Continental Congress to alter its non-importation policy towards Bermudian salt traders. Unlike other commodities, salt was therefore legally permitted entry and Bermudian vessels carrying it were

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<sup>126</sup> Lord North quoted in Samuel Flagg Bemis, Lord North and William Eden, 'Secret Intelligence, 1777: Two Documents', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 3 (May, 1961), pp. 237-238.

<sup>127</sup> The National Archives, William Brimage to the Secretary of State, 1780, CO 37/37 ff. 73-74.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

safe from American privateers and naval vessels. This was a concession never granted to those who carried sugar, molasses and rum. While it was in operation, this policy placed Bermudian salt traders in a profoundly advantageous position.

During the last two years of the war, this commercial advantage did temper, as the policy itself was rescinded. This was for two main reasons. First, once France entered the war, harassment of Turks Islands greatly increased. This began in August 1778 when several French privateers attacked Turks Islands.<sup>129</sup> By May 1780, Governor Maxwell reported that French privateers ‘have more than once come in force and frightened the Inhabitants’.<sup>130</sup> Repeated predations encouraged the King’s Agent to journey to London that summer to try and secure an agreement for the improved defence of the islands. While he was there, he stated that from ‘very recent accounts...they [Turks Islands] have been so much harassed by the French privateers, that part of the inhabitants have abandoned those Islands’.<sup>131</sup> While these depredations and losses were not definitive, they undercut the profitability of the salt trade while increasing its risk. With less salt to trade, Bermudians were less welcome in American ports.<sup>132</sup>

At the same time, the revolution brought fleeing Loyalists to Bermuda who began to fit out privateers once Lieutenant-Governor Bruere arrived and offered them his complete support.<sup>133</sup> These privateers indiscriminately targeted American and Bermudian shipping in their pursuit of prize goods. Though by mid-1780 no Bermudian had yet registered a vessel as a privateer, the next two years saw a change. As the salt-provisions trade became less certain and Britain’s control of the seas more assured, many Bermudians grew to envy wealthy Loyalist privateers like Goodrich. By April 1783, seventeen Bermudian vessels were privateers and in the previous year 130 prizes had been brought into

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<sup>129</sup> The National Archives, Letter from King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State, 22 September 1778, CO 23/24/24.

<sup>130</sup> The National Archives, Governor Maxwell to the Board of Trade, 3 May 1780, CO 23/10 ff. 42-43.

<sup>131</sup> The National Archives, King’s Agent Andrew Symmer to the Secretary of State, 26 December 1780, CO 37/22/24.

<sup>132</sup> There are also reports of a hurricane that swept through the Caribbean in October of 1780, which may have done substantial damage to the Turks Island salt pans rendering a temporary halt on its operations. However, these reports are not currently substantiated with sufficient archival evidence to comment further. See Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, pp. 430-431.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, pp. 425-430.

Bermuda's port.<sup>134</sup> Of these, Goodrich's *Experiment* proved the most successful, but several Bermudians were also benefactors.

Understandably, a reduction in the salt trade combined with an increase in privateers outfitting from Bermuda ruffled feathers in Philadelphia. The Continental Congress perceived a change in the colony's utility and allegiance. In March 1781, it withdrew its previous concession and banned trade with Bermuda.<sup>135</sup> This change is notable, but it should not be over-emphasised. Several states including North Carolina circumvented these prohibitions and continued to welcome any Bermudians who entered their ports with salt – so desperate were they for the commodity. Nor does it detract from Bermuda's unusual and privileged access to American markets prior to March 1781. Moreover, as this chapter has shown, any hiatus in the salt-provisions trade between North America, Bermuda and Turks Islands was temporary. In the immediate aftermath of war, it revived again.

## Conclusion

'Disaster' as a category of analysis has a complex history. As Jonathon Bergman has reflected, 'disaster is one of those extraordinary phenomena that is ubiquitous yet indescribable'.<sup>136</sup> Historical interpretations of disasters have varied widely 'from supernatural occurrence to earthly force...finally yielding to its present day configuration as a social event'.<sup>137</sup> As a historical geographer, Bergman seeks to denaturalise so-called 'natural' disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes by demonstrating how these events immediately come to inhabit a social, human world and become disastrous only when a society's economic and social systems fail to plan or respond effectively. While this chapter has not dealt with a 'natural' disaster, it too has found this last configuration useful for the way it evaluates the *resilience* of socioeconomic systems. In interrogating the nuanced effects of disasters, historians can compare and contrast the structural

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<sup>134</sup> The National Archives, List of privateers belonging to Bermuda from 4 April 1782 to 4 April 1783, 4 April 1782, CO 37/39 ff. 24-25. The National Archives, List of prizes captured and brought into the Port of Bermuda from 4 April 1782 to 4 April 1783, 4 April 1783, CO 37/39 ff. 26-28.

<sup>135</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p. 626.

<sup>136</sup> Bergman, 'Disaster', p. 934.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 935.

weaknesses and vulnerabilities of disparate societies. In the end, what makes an event a ‘disaster’ says more about the socioeconomic systems in place, than it does about the event itself.

In the sugar islands of the British Caribbean, the American Revolution was a disaster in this sense of the term. Their plantation economies and prominent position within the British Empire meant their experience of revolution would be severe. By the mid-eighteenth century, these islands were monocultures that prioritised profits and agribusiness above agricultural self-sufficiency. As they lost food sovereignty, they became the jewels of the British imperial crown, but in their meteoric rise vulnerabilities were sown into their economic and political structures. As war with the thirteen colonies dawned, Britain moved fast to protect and ring-fence these wealthier sugar economies as the empire preserved what it understood to be the key to its success: a mercantile economic system based around sugar. Naval warships, soldiers and privateers patrolled their coastlines and seaways regularly. Opportunity for an extensive contraband trade was consequently limited.

At the same time, these islands faced a more hostile continental neighbour in what was their traditional provisions provider. During the revolution, the rebellious colonies did not *need* sugar, molasses and rum. Though undoubtedly many American colonists wanted these products, nonetheless they were not *essential* to their survival. As such, the Continental Congress rigorously pursued a policy of non-importation as a way to bring Britain to the negotiating table, meaning there was no guarantee that British vessels carrying sugar, molasses or rum would ever pass American privateers and naval vessels unharmed. Even without the British blockade, an illicit sugar-provisions trade was high-risk. This did not mean that the sugar islands’ reliance on the continental colonies for food subsided or that viable alternatives were found. It meant that in the shortfall there was widespread famine. The sugar islands’ economic and social systems could not dynamically adjust.

For the salt islands, the American Revolution was highly disruptive but not disastrous, primarily because their economic and social systems were dynamic. Both during and after the war, a largely flourishing salt-provisions trade permitted Bermuda and Turks Islands better access to food. Though highly vulnerable as small, co-dependent and infertile islands, they possessed several

advantages that made their economies more resilient. Unlike the sugar islands, they had a product that was in high demand in North America and for which notable exceptions were made to encourage its importation throughout most of the revolution. They also had joint histories of smuggling that meant engaging in a clandestine trade was, if not routine, certainly familiar upon the onset of war. Moreover, the Bahamas and Bermuda Governors approached this illicit trade in decidedly weak positions, not least because in Bermuda there was a powerful Assembly and Council whose own actions towards the salt-provisions trade were nonchalant at best. Their merchant backgrounds, widespread family connections, and socioeconomic ties with America made them an insurmountable obstacle to the executive function at this time.

Under these conditions, it was ferociously difficult for a Governor, however good his intention, to follow imperial decree. Taken together, these factors gave the salt islands a comparative advantage over the sugar islands despite their shared vulnerabilities as small island territories. Unlike the sugar islands, Bermuda and Turks Islands' politics of provisions allowed them to ignore imperial orders and shun the legal system in which they were embedded. As a result, during the American revolutionary period, British mercantilism often failed to keep their salt-provisions trade within its imperial borders.

This period (1775-1789) would mark the beginning of the end of the salt-provisions trade between Bermuda and Turks Islands. Though salt gathering would remain an important economic pursuit for many Bermudians, the 1790s saw a recalibration in Bermuda's island economy.<sup>138</sup> For one, the United States Congress passed the Tonnage Act in 1789 that priced many Bermudian merchants out of the carrying trade, as British vessels were suddenly forced to pay fifty cents per ton upon entry to the United States when American vessels paid six. More significantly, Bermuda's role in the Atlantic was changing. As Britain grappled with a new Atlantic order following the American Revolution, it became clear Bermuda would no longer be of marginal concern. The loss of the North American colonies left Bermuda as the only British port between Canada and the Caribbean. Its capture by a hostile nation during war was too great a risk. During the French Revolutionary Wars, the Admiralty sent hydrographers and

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<sup>138</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, pp. 449-458.



surveyors to map the island's waters and began purchasing real estate. Bermuda's garrison was increased to a full regiment. By 1812, His Majesty's Naval Dockyard was under construction and in 1818 the Admiralty relocated its North Atlantic Station there entirely.

This process brought hundreds of jobs to Bermuda and secured a newfound loyalty to the Crown. With increased employment, cash in circulation, and troops stationed at all corners, Bermudians finally revoked their habitual smuggling practices. In the French Revolutionary Wars and War of 1812, Turks Islands would frequently welcome illicit cargoes of provisions but these would come from visiting American vessels, not usually Bermudian merchants. Put simply, a salt-provisions run from the United States to Bermuda and Turks Islands was no longer a profitable venture in peacetime or worth the risk in war. While socioeconomic links remained, Bermuda and Turks Islands would grow less dependent on each other for food as the 1790s progressed.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This thesis has provided a briny counterpoint to the sucro-centric model of Caribbean historiography in order to demonstrate that the plantation model of Caribbean development cannot fully explicate the region's diverse economic, social, political and environmental processes. It has achieved this through a cis-Atlantic history of the principal salt islands of the British Caribbean – Turks Islands – from their first discovery by Bermudian seafarers to a generation beyond emancipation. It has explored a variety of historical themes at different analytical levels to argue that the history of Turks Islands, and their position within the British Atlantic world, cannot be fully understood without paying serious attention to the commodity they produced.

### **Summary of findings**

This case was first made in Chapters 3 and 4 that approached Turks Islands' shores from a regional, inter-island perspective to analyse issues of settlement and sovereignty. The settlement of Turks Islands followed an unusual pattern within the British Caribbean. Unlike the sugar islands which were characterised relatively quickly by terrestrial, fixed and permanent settlement patterns, settlement of Turks Islands was more transient, migratory and maritime in nature. On the sugar islands, the substantial up-front costs involved in constructing, maintaining and securing a plantation, as well as the possibility of staggering crop-cycles throughout the year, encouraged the development of landed populations. In contrast, the barren saline environment, the shorter length of the salt season, the lower up-front costs in salt raking, and the strong socioeconomic links between Bermuda and the salt gatherers, all dissuaded permanent, terrestrial habitation. However, as the salt industry grew more profitable, and the Bahamas more financially overstretched, Bahamas Governors increasingly tried to extend jurisdiction to and claim salt taxes within these islands. In the fraught diplomatic battle that ensued, the salt gatherers were adamant that Turks Islands were independent of the Bahamas. When this dispute was belatedly brought to the British Government, London ministers were baffled.

In the end, early-modern conceptions of space, and legal arguments surrounding Britain's historic claims to these islands, played decisive roles in the debate's resolution. In 1803, *de facto* Bermudian rule gave way to *de jure* Bahamian sovereignty and a more traditional settlement pattern began to emerge. Yet, for over a century, the maritime, migratory and transient settlement patterns of Turks Islands – preferred by Bermudians and informed by salt's seasonal rhythms – offered a remarkably different blueprint for settlement within the British Caribbean.

Chapters 5 and 6 then zoomed in at a local level to assess the political economy and labour systems that matured around salt. From the mid-eighteenth century, a fairly singular economic system developed at Turks Islands. In an era when privatisation might have been expected, the Head Rights System stood out as a shared resource system based on collective ownership. Its most notable features were in contrast to the privately owned sugar plantations. However, this 'creole commons' was not an archaic leftover. As Chapter 5 argued, the Head Rights System was a creative, adaptive and innovative hybrid – neither completely of the Old World nor entirely of the New but a synthesis, drawing on English, Bermudian and Turks Island influences. It enjoyed longevity, but, in 1845, it was dismantled. Chapter 6 charted that change while it investigated the experiences of those who laboured on the ponds in slavery and in freedom. It argued that labour in the salt industry was always unfree in some way primarily because working with salt was an intense and debilitating form of labour. It also demonstrated that there were aspects of salt island slavery that distinctly shaped enslaved labour. Not only was the Head Rights System silent in offering enslaved persons protection, it also barred them from raking salt on their own account and limited permissible *petit marronage* to an unprecedented degree. At the same time, environmental conditions did not favour the enslaved salt raker. The lack of a mountainous interior, or any interior at all, restricted opportunities to escape while soil infertility precluded the development of a provision ground system. Together, these features made it particularly challenging for salt rakers to develop meaningful spheres of socioeconomic autonomy. In freedom, these systems of domination changed but they did not end. Through a combination of land and labour manipulations, the salt ponds were enclosed and privatised, while the salt rakers were brought back as wage labourers. Chapters 5 and 6

therefore charted the rise and fall of a singular economic system within the British Caribbean in order to explain how systems of domination and profitable salt extraction persisted in freedom.

Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 panned out for an Atlantic perspective, assessing the position of Turks Islands within the British Atlantic world through an analysis of their defence and provisioning. Chapter 7 argued that, as Out Islands of the Bahamian archipelago, Turks Islands were some of the most precariously placed within the British Caribbean. However, following a French attack in 1764, British imperial and colonial actors decided that geopolitical security in this region had been compromised. In line with British mercantilism, which saw value in shepherding trade along discrete ocean corridors, Turks Islands were elevated to a position of prominence due to their expanding salt-gathering population and location near the entrance of the Windward Passage. In order to protect British use of this sea-lane, Turks Islands were transformed into a watery enclave of empire and awarded a King's Agent in order to encourage further development. From thereon, Turks Islands were able to secure small but critical military resources to protect their salt trade and project a 'force-field' over the nearby Windward Passage. While Chapter 7 tracked the strengthening of British mercantilism at Turks Islands, Chapter 8 explored its failure during a period of instability: the American Revolution. It argued that while the American Revolution proved a disaster for the sugar islands, it did not have the same consequences for the salt islands. The war activated a politics of provisions in Bermuda and Turks Islands that allowed them to undercut British mercantilism, as the pressing need for salt across North America ensured their salt-provisions trade largely endured. As a result, these co-dependent islands obtained food more regularly, and in sufficient quantity, to avoid the worst effects of famine. Chapters 7 and 8 therefore unpacked a story about the construction and failure of British mercantilism at Turks Islands, in which their salt-gathering population proved both an asset and liability.

In its effort to move beyond the plantation and follow a sinew population of Bermudian salt gatherers, merchants and enslaved salt rakers into an alternative space of slavery, this thesis has achieved its aim of diversifying our understanding of Caribbean processes and societies. That diversity is important because it demonstrates the plasticity and complexity of an entangled British

Atlantic that needed both salt and sugar, amongst other commodities, to sustain its economies and unequal societies. At Turks Islands, the discovery of salt drew thousands of free and enslaved persons to their shores; it saw millions of salt bushels exported to preserve Atlantic food chains; and it wove a poignant and rich inter-island history between Turks Islands and Bermuda. This trajectory was unusual, often in contrast to the sugar islands, but that did not mean their histories were separate. Here the salt industry did not compete with the sugar industry. It complemented, supported and *literally* fed into it. In delving into the history of salt's production and trade, this thesis furthers the work of Caribbean and Atlantic historians who shine a light on the ancillary industries of the sugar plantation complex – in order to understand how deep-rooted, far-flung and hidden these subsidiary supports really were.

### **Turks Islands and Bermuda's maritime economy**

While this thesis has found value in using salt as a counterpoint to sugar, a rich inter-island history between Bermuda and Turks Islands has also unfurled. At the turn of the nineteenth century, salt was coveted in the British Atlantic world. For Captain John Lightbourn, a Bermudian salt gatherer, salt was his livelihood. It prompted him to straddle business and family commitments across two colonies, and live on an island that offered little in terms of agriculture, or even water. As the years progressed, a commitment to salt encouraged Lightbourn to create two lives, two homes, in Bermuda and Turks Islands. When he died at Turks Islands in 1819, his will reflected that fact.<sup>1</sup> As his first wife had already died in Bermuda, he left his Bermudian house, outhouses, land and real estate to their son Robert, gave lifetime access to a bedroom in the main house to their daughter Hannah, and divided any residues of the estate between all three of their children – Robert, Hannah and William. Over in Turks Islands, he left his house, furniture, outhouses, land, seven enslaved persons and £400 Bermuda currency to his second wife and named his Bermudian sons and two friends at Turks Islands trustees of his two illegitimate children there. His will was a lasting

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<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Antoinette Lightbourn Butz, *The Letterbook of Captain John Lightbourn Sr and William Astwood* (Bermuda: White Lodge Press, 2013), pp. 77-79.

testament to the evolution of a family that had branched out across Turks Islands and Bermuda, all because of the value ascribed to a small, white crystal.

Such inter-island connections had a long history dating from when Bermudian seafarers first discovered Turks Islands in the 1660s. Their apparent endurance in 1819 raises an important question about the transplantation of colonial societies. When a colony pursues secondary settlement and incorporates further places into its sphere of influence, certain processes and features will transfer across but not all. Local permutations will often speak back in their own vernacular. Within the confines of this thesis, this begs the question: to what extent should we consider Turks Islands an extension of Bermuda's maritime economy, bearing a similar likeness with its other maritime activities? In other words, what moved and did not move between Bermuda and Turks Islands? And was there a palatable change over time, with an emergent Turks Island identity beginning to form?

When considering the integration of the Atlantic, historians of merchant networks and commodities have increasingly argued that trade and private enterprise were more important in facilitating this process than metropolitan investment or imperial decrees. This thesis has similarly found that, at least prior to 1764, investment from London or instructions from state officials were of secondary importance to the incorporation of Turks Islands within the British Atlantic world (Chapters 3 and 4). Instead, Bermudian salt gatherers and merchants were instrumental. Though Turks Islands were tiny, flat, and barren, their extensive salinas made them valuable to those who had the determination to nurture them. While Bermudian salt gatherers and their enslaved companies provided the necessary labour, incoming Bermuda sloops supported their efforts by bringing foodstuffs and manufactures in exchange for the raked salt. It was this repetitive, cyclical movement of people, provisions and salt between Bermuda and Turks Islands that meaningfully drew the latter into the British imperial network.

Moreover, in this remote location, there was little oversight from the Bermuda or Bahamas Government. In practice, the Bermudian salt gatherers had an inordinate amount of control over Turks Island affairs. It was from their consensual customary practices, informed by salt's seasonal rhythms, that the Head Rights System likely evolved (Chapter 5). Its tendency towards collective

ownership suited the salt gatherers' migratory and maritime lifestyles and mirrored Bermudian practices in other watery commons, including wrecking, whaling, and privateering, where profits were similarly shared.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when the Head Rights System was formally encoded in 1767, the salt gatherers elected commissioners from amongst themselves to join the King's Agent in governing and settling local disputes. Given the lack of magisterial courts, this gave these transient inhabitants significant leverage over how the islands were run. That personal power increased dramatically within the islands' form of slavery (Chapter 6). Considering that 83 per cent of the population at Grand Turk were still classified as free or enslaved Bermudians in 1801, it seems evident that white Bermudians were influential and powerful figures at Turks Islands, shaping how the islands were internally managed and externally integrated into the British Atlantic world.<sup>3</sup>

Migrations to Turks Islands also significantly impacted Bermuda's island society. In the late seventeenth century, Bermuda had been considered overcrowded. Salt gathering offered an outlet in which to employ the island's 'meanest rank of [white] Bermudians' as well as the island's underemployed enslaved persons.<sup>4</sup> Many households in Bermuda relied on hiring-out their enslaved persons for their main source of income. As those who left for Turks Islands were predominantly male, the salt industry contributed to the sense that eighteenth-century Bermuda was a society of women.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of their husbands, brothers and fathers, white Bermudian women grew more socioeconomically independent.<sup>6</sup> Over winter, Bermudian salt gatherers would return to Bermuda, using those months to reconnect with family, settle business affairs, buy provisions for the following salt season and pay taxes to the

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<sup>2</sup> For a description and analysis of Bermuda's watery commons see Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 185-256.

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives, The Address of the Council and Assembly of Bermuda to the King including a Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands with its appendices, 'Appendix E of A Supplement to a State of the Claim of His Majesty's Bermuda Subjects to their Ancient privileges at the Turks Islands', 20 July 1801, CO 37/52 f. 85.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, Governor Shirley to the Secretary of State, 21 October 1770, CO 23/8 f. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Forman Crane, 'The Socioeconomics of a Female Majority in Eighteenth-Century Bermuda', *Signs*, Vol. 15 No. 2 (Winter, 1990), pp. 231-258.

<sup>6</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, pp. 297-301.

Bermuda Government. These contributions to Bermuda's maritime economy were strengthened by the fact Turks Island salt also provided Bermudian transatlantic merchants with a sustainable and largely predictable staple with which to trade and obtain valuable provisions for their countrymen back home. This became particularly important during the American Revolution when the perseverance of the salt-provisions trade meant Bermudians avoided the high rates of famine experienced elsewhere (Chapter 8). Yet, the importance of Turks Islands to Bermuda's maritime economy is perhaps most clearly expressed in the vehement protests and mobilisations of the Bermuda legislature whenever the Bahamas Government threatened to extend its jurisdiction over Turks Islands (Chapters 3 and 4). Land-poor Bermudians may have exploited a number of watery commons throughout the Caribbean, but salt gathering was their most sustainable, systematic and coveted offshore venture.

However, there were aspects of Turks Islands' society and development that had little to do with Bermuda and did not transfer across. After 1764, the imperial government would have more influence over Turks Islands' Atlantic integration than historians of merchant networks would lead us to believe (Chapter 7). Following the French attack on Turks Islands, the British Government created a new position within the empire called the Turks Islands King's Agent, which secured international recognition for British sovereignty over Turks Islands. Thereafter, this official worked with his superiors and the salt gatherers to improve the islands' defence and introduce an official set of pond regulations. This created institutional stability and the conditions needed for a more systematic salt industry to mature. After 1766, more and more white Bermudians were drawn into an increasingly dependable industry and subsequently felt more confident to employ their enslaved labourers.

The British Government intervened in 1764 partly because it understood how valuable salt was to its navy, northern cod fisheries, American colonies and Caribbean sugar plantations (Chapter 5). Salt was one of the few colonial products not to be enumerated. It could be shipped directly from foreign to colonial ports because Britain could not meet the rapacious demand for this item within its colonies. Protecting Turks Islands in 1764, which promised to be a valuable source of salt, was prudent imperial policy. However, London ministers also intervened because Bermuda's salt gatherers and their enslaved salt rakers



populated islands that were strategically situated next to the Windward Passage, making them valuable to British mercantilism and the protection of Jamaica's sugar trade (Chapter 7). The resultant synergy – between salt's importance and the islands' strategic significance – encouraged the British Government to intervene. As such, while Bermudian salt gatherers worked continuously to bring Turks Islands into their merchant networks, imperial actors did at times exercise a capacity to smooth the way.

This is important because within Bermuda's historiography, there is the assumption that prior to the relocation of the Admiralty's North Atlantic Station, Bermudians were by and large left to themselves and considered an annoyance to London ministers. While Michael Jarvis has questioned this by demonstrating the importance of Bermuda's maritime activities for connecting the Atlantic's intercolonial trade, this thesis offers a further caveat: at Turks Islands, Bermudians were more important to British imperial designs than they are usually given credit for. The British Government's cooperation in facilitating the protection and industry of the Bermudian salt gatherers demonstrates that fact. Such imperial interventions set Turks Islands apart from Bermuda's other, less regulated, watery commons.

A further divergence is the fact the proximate environment was a real agent in Turks Islands' history. Taking inspiration from oceanic histories, the impacts of the Atlantic Ocean on Turks Island processes have not been taken for granted in this thesis. For one, the ocean shaped how Turks Islands were settled. Seafarers from Bermuda arrived on Turks Islands' shores from across the Sargasso Sea. Its favourable trade winds helped sustain the annual migrations that led to these islands becoming co-dependent and transformed by their socioeconomic relationship (Chapters 3 and 4). In contrast, the difficulty of sailing against trade winds and navigating the hazardous reefs between New Providence and Turks Islands consistently negated the integration of the latter within the Bahamas Government. Moreover, conceptions of ocean space shaped Turks Islands' trajectory. While early-modern conceptions of ocean space became important in the geographical arguments that, with or without intention, served to legitimise Bahamian claims to Turks Islands (Chapter 3), the spatiality of British mercantilism revealed a socially constructed Caribbean Sea that prioritised certain sea-lanes and helped transform the islands from a vulnerable,

unregulated, and unclaimed commons to a watery enclave of empire (Chapter 7). Most significantly, it was out of the ocean that Turks Islands' saline environment was born.

More than any other factor, salt has shaped the history related within this thesis. As discussed above, salt significantly contributed to Bermuda's maritime economy. However, in its materiality, salt was also something new, causing Turks Islands' society to diverge from Bermuda's. First, salt raking took place in a fixed location. Unlike other watery commons that moved around, salt gathering relied on specific environmental conditions that regularly brought populations to specific saline islands. The annual assembling of Bermudians at these sites not only changed how Britain viewed Turks Islands within its mercantilist strategy, it also sowed vulnerabilities. Prior to 1764, French privateers and pirates could predict when and where vulnerable Bermudian salt gatherers and their vessels would amass. This vulnerability was most apparent during the French attack on Turks Islands in 1764, which prompted the British Government to reactively assert sovereignty over Turks Islands (Chapter 7). But such territorial sovereignty was only possible because these maritime commons were concentrated on specific islands and, unlike fish, turtles, wrecks or privateers, they did not move around.

Moreover, harvesting salt presented its own challenges. While white Bermudians initially raked salt, once the islands were more secure a system of salt island slavery began to replace that labour. This shift from free to enslaved labour was seen across Bermuda's maritime activities, but there were notable differences at Turks Islands. Salt island slavery had characteristics it did not share with Bermuda's maritime slavery. Whereas Bermuda's maritime slavery tended to be less violent, less hierarchical, more autonomous and more skilled, labour on the salt islands was more regimented, more monotonous and more supervised. It was low skilled and low-tech, involving gang labour and larger concentrations of enslaved persons. Here a predominantly male white creole culture emerged that was known for excess and its power to punish with impunity. In its intensity and propensity towards violence, salt island slavery was, in fact, much more like sugar plantation slavery than it was Bermudian maritime slavery. In her *History*, Mary Prince alluded to this dissonance between slavery in Bermuda and Turks Islands, as much as her own inter-island history

testified to their enduring connection. After ten years of salt raking she returned to Bermuda with her master, but upon witnessing his aggression towards her resurface, she protested: ‘Sir, this is not Turk’s Islands!’<sup>7</sup>

This raises a question. Either Turks Islands’ slavery was an inexplicable aberration or it was somehow connected to, even representative of, Bermuda’s slavery system despite its lack of familial resemblance. During the eighteenth century, the Turks Islands were a sub-colony, or secondary settlement, of Bermuda and predominantly comprised of its sojourning and seafaring countrymen. These men moved from Bermuda to Turks Islands, and back again. Yet, Bermuda’s form of maritime slavery did not move with them. This non-transfer makes sense only when the nature of Turks Islands’ environment and salt production is considered. As this thesis has shown, Turks Islands’ harsh environmental conditions, the materiality of salt, and the unique demands of its production, drove an intense form of labour that desensitised Bermudian slaveholders in this remote location (Chapter 6). In this setting, Bermudian maritime slavery evolved. For historians of slavery, this thesis demonstrates the institution could rapidly change across colonial spaces, even when they were as intimately connected as Turks Islands and Bermuda. It urges them, and commodity historians more broadly, to thoughtfully consider the materiality and agency of commodities in affecting the structure and intensity of labour systems.

Salt’s seasonality and the industry’s low start-up costs also shaped the Head Rights System that matured around salt (Chapter 5). For one, fear that rain would come and ‘melt’ the salt or weaken the brine ponds was always a factor of concern. These islands were very small and any event of rain near harvest time would likely destroy a significant portion of a salt harvest. In these circumstances, holding a quantity of the ponds in common was good insurance. Second, salt could not be produced all year round. This seasonality helped shape the annual pattern of maritime migration that saw the majority of inhabitants leave the salt islands over winter. Maintaining the ponds as private property in these conditions would have been difficult. Third, the average salt gatherer required minimal capital for his venture, while the profits to be made were

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave. Related by herself with a Supplement by the Editor. To which is added, the Narrative of Asa-Asa. A captured African* (ed. by Thomas Pringle, London: Westley and A H Davis, 1831), p. 13.

modest. In salt raking, the sun and wind performed most of the work. Enslaved labour was still the largest cost but the skills required were low and the workforce could be moved. This combination of low-risk and low-reward suited a shared resource system in which the transaction costs of enclosing the ponds and monitoring behaviour, especially in the winter dead months, would have exceeded the moderate benefits to be gained by the individual. All these features of salt production supported the migratory settlement and Head Rights System that typified Turks Islands.

Yet it was the revenue potential in salt taxation that definitively changed the position of Turks Islands within Bermuda's maritime economy. Following the American Revolution, the Bahamas were plunged into a financial crisis that only worsened during the French Revolutionary Wars; while at Turks Islands, the wealth of the salt industry, the enduring salt-provisions trade, and the success of their land and sea defences, allowed these islands to navigate the shifting geopolitical climate more safely (Chapters 7 and 8). As the Bahamas Government searched for a new source of income, it challenged Bermudian hegemony over Turks Islands, passing legislation to extend political representation to Turks Islands in 1799 and to tax the salt trade in 1802 (Chapters 3 and 4). The fractious intra-colonial crisis that ensued brought the issue to Britain where the Bermuda Government failed to convince London ministers of its right to Turks Islands. As Bahamian jurisdiction and salt taxation were extended to Turks Islands, an era of more permanent, terrestrial settlement was inaugurated. This would, over time, disengage Turks Islands from Bermuda's maritime economy.

Consequently, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a more independent Turks Island society was beginning to emerge and diverge from its Bermudian roots. Salt production had evolved. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this was an ad-hoc, opportunistic and risky enterprise, carried out by white male crewmembers offloaded from passing merchant vessels. These transient, sinew populations were noticeably a part of Bermuda's maritime economy and likely engaged in a variety of maritime activities. At this time, salt gathering was more like beach combing – an opportunistic and chancy venture – and salt gatherers annually returned to Bermuda where their families, friends and countrymen lived. However, from the mid-eighteenth century, salt

production become a more systematic, structured and protected industry, with a specific form of slavery under the watchful eye of the King's Agent and his Royal Regulations. At this point, salt raking blurred the line between terrestrial and aquatic pursuits. While salt raking could never be described as agricultural, Turks Islands' salt industry began to resemble something that was more 'terraqueous'.<sup>8</sup> Institutional stability and enhanced protection drew more Bermudians to invest their time, enslaved labour and capital in the ponds. As the salinas' size and salt season were limited, profits relied on increasing productivity. Channels, sluices, gates, warehouses, wharfs and more durable dwellings were all constructed to manipulate the saline environment. Over time, we therefore witness a sea change: salt raking became less maritime and mobile as the nineteenth century progressed and increasingly the remit of those who, like Lightbourn, lived permanently on the islands. While socioeconomic connections between Bermuda and Turks Islands endured, their hey-day would remain in the eighteenth century.

### **Further implications**

Across this thesis two further methodological and historiographical points have emerged. As they are in dialogue with key aspects of Caribbean, oceanic and commodity history, they are worth underscoring. First, this thesis has utilised a flexible methodology, incorporating aspects of a trans-, sub-, and infra-Atlantic history within a predominantly cis-Atlantic approach because of its conviction that all these perspectives and thematic investigations have been necessary to achieve the thesis aim: to diversify our understanding of Caribbean processes by focusing on societies that matured around salt. It has allowed for a wide and varied exploration of salt's contribution to Turks Islands' settlement, development and position within the British Atlantic world. Moreover, it has responded to the need within Caribbean historiography for more regional and Atlantic analyses of some of the most marginalised islands of the British Caribbean. In this thesis, Bermuda and Turks Islands have shared a unique and rich inter-island history, while the Bahamas, Saint Domingue, Jamaica, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Bashford, 'Terraqueous histories', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 60 No. 2 (Jun., 2017), pp. 253-272.

North American colonies have also been gathered into the analysis. This specific clustering of colonies is particular to this history. It would not have emerged in the same way through a history that had focused on sugar, coffee, chocolate, indigo or tobacco, or even in a history of Turks Islands that had not looked outwards as well as inwards. In so doing, this thesis has demonstrated there is fruitfulness in research that not only looks beyond the plantation, but also remains sensitive to scale.

Second, through tracing the rich inter-island histories of Bermuda and Turks Islands, this thesis has often (though not always) de-centred Europe. It has found the self-directed and self-organised kith and kinship networks of Bermuda's merchant fleet were predominantly responsible for drawing uninhabited Turks Islands into the British Empire. At times, the British Government would act decisively for Turks Islands' protection and development: appointing the islands a King's Agent, sanctioning the Head Rights System and ruling Turks Islands were a part of the Bahamas. However, these interventions were often reactive and only ever a part of the story. Moreover, within the time period of this study, the most important trading relationships for Turks Islands were with Bermuda and the North American mainland, underscoring the fact colonists were not only producers of goods but consumers as well. Salt was in demand in the colonies because it was needed to preserve animal proteins that fed Caribbean and American populations. Such food chains could and did help tie the Atlantic together, sometimes in ways metropolitan actors least preferred. As a result, this thesis has found common ground with Atlantic histories that suggest the real agents of empire may well have been on the so-called margins.

## Appendix A: Chronology of Events

<b>1609</b>	Settlement of Bermuda.
<b>1651</b>	The first Navigation Act is passed to enact mercantilist principles within the British Empire.
<b>1660s</b>	Maritime Bermudians first discover the salt ponds of Turks Islands.
<b>1676</b>	Governor John Heydon of Bermuda caps importation of new enslaved persons into the islands. From then on, Bermuda develops a naturally increasing creole enslaved population.
<b>1684</b>	Bermuda is returned to Crown rule after the Somer Islands Company's charter is revoked. This marks the start of Bermuda's maritime revolution and its turn away from agriculture towards the sea. Salt raking activities at Turks Islands increase.
<i>1756-1763</i>	<i>The Seven Years' War.</i>
<b>1764</b>	French attack on Turks Islands.
<b>1766</b>	Andrew Symmer is appointed the first Turks Islands King's Agent.
<b>1767</b>	The Head Rights System is encoded in unofficial regulations. With regulations and Crown protection guaranteed, more Bermudians are drawn into the salt trade and there is an increased use of enslaved labour on the ponds.
<b>1768</b>	The Secretary of State reprimands King's Agent Symmer's attempt to restrict access to the salt ponds and reaffirms that access must be free and unrestrained to all British subjects.
<b>1774</b>	With the help of the King's Agent, the Bahamas Government passes 'An Act for the better regulating and Government of the Salt Ponds at the Turks Islands'. This encodes the Head Rights System in official regulations.
<i>1775-1783</i>	<i>American Revolutionary War.</i>
<b>1775</b>	The Continental Congress permits the provincial councils of Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland to export commodities to friendly ports, including Bermuda, in return for salt.
<b>1776</b>	Nassau is attacked by American rebel forces.  Governor Shirley of the Bahamas decrees only salt can be exported directly from Turks Islands and only provisions can be

- imported directly within. This signals the end of a period when Turks Islands effectively operated as an illegal free port.
- 1778** Nassau is attacked for the second time by American rebel forces.
- Leading members of the Bermudian legislature form an association against privateers.
- 1781** The King and his Privy Council sign the Royal Regulations.
- In March, the Continental Congress withdraws its concession to permit safe entry to Bermudian salt traders and bans trade with Bermuda. Illegal smuggling continues with several states.
- 1783** The British Government grants lands for the resettlement of refugee Loyalists in the Bahamas. The Bahamas experience a financial and administrative crisis in the wake of a doubling population, a reversal in the ethnic make-up of its society and escalating fortification costs.
- In February, three French vessels of war attack Turks Islands and seize possession until the end of the American Revolutionary War.
- 1786** John Dunmore is appointed Governor of the Bahamas (he is recalled in 1796).
- 1789** Alexander Murray is appointed Turks Islands King's Agent.
- 1790** Surveys of Turks Islands are produced for Governor Dunmore.
- King's Agent Murray raises a militia at Turks Islands.
- 1792-1802** *French Revolutionary Wars.*
- 1792** Governor Dunmore sends a detachment of troops to Turks Islands to press inhabitants to conform to Bahamian tax laws.
- 1794** King's Agent Murray hires the armed cutter *Victory* to patrol Turks Islands.
- 1799** The Bahamas legislature passes an Act on political representation that allows Turks Islands to elect a representative to its Assembly. It gains Royal Assent.
- King's Agent Murray hires the armed schooner *Admiral Duncan* to patrol Turks Islands.
- 1800** Loyalist attempts at cotton production are largely abandoned in the Bahamas.



- 1802** The Bahamas Assembly passes an Act to implement a colonial tax on salt to include Turks Islands, which are now the most successful salt-producing islands of the Bahamian archipelago.
- Mary Prince arrives at Turks Islands and becomes a salt raker for approximately ten years before she returns to Bermuda.
- 1803** The Attorney and Solicitor General rule Turks Islands are a part of the Bahamas. This signals a trend towards more permanent, terrestrial and traditional settlement patterns.
- 1806** Captain John Lightbourn is known to be living at Turks Islands (until his death in 1819).
- 1812-1815** *The War of 1812.*
- 1818** The Admiralty relocates its North Atlantic Station to Bermuda's Royal Naval Dockyard.
- 1834** Slavery is abolished across the British Empire and the apprenticeship system begins.
- 1838** The apprenticeship system ends across the British Empire and full emancipation is announced.
- 1845** The Head Rights System is dismantled, the ponds are enclosed and credit and truck systems begin to emerge.

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